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EDITOR'S LETTER

It has always fascinated me that inside a bulb is everything needed to grow into an incredible flower. A nascent bud, wrapped in leaves, inside a papery tunic, that is waiting to grow when the conditions are right. This issue of *Gardens Illustrated* is in praise of small things.

Many small spring flowers are worthy of close inspection and part of the appeal is their transience. 'These fleeting moments caught, is when pot culture excites me,' Troy Scott Smith replied when I asked him to draw up his ideas for planting combinations for pots, inspired by the garden at Sissinghurst and its creator Vita Sackville-West. Vita likened the miniature form of gardening that is container planting to a jeweller working in precious stones. Sissinghurst is the epitome of an English garden, but Vita and her husband Harold's plant choice was often influenced by their travels. As head gardener there, Troy has inherited a wealth of knowledge that allows him to take an intuitive approach to plants and plant combinations.

RHS judge and Veitch Memorial Medal holder, Rod Leeds has a particular interest in early bulbs and their cultivation. With a scale and form that is often markedly different to more familiar spring cultivars, plants such as *Tulipa clusiana* and *Fritillaria elwesii* are beautiful and look delicate, yet are incredibly robust. These are plants that can withstand the coldest weather and that will return year after year. Rod shares the early bulbs and alpines he grows in his Suffolk garden as well as his tips for growing bulbs, including from seed.

As the designer of the bulb garden at the Rijksmuseum and consultant for one of the Netherlands' largest bulb suppliers, Carien van Boxtel was well placed to create a flower-studded lawn in response to request for grass. The lawn she made is planted with narcissi, and notable for its smaller-than-average size for a bulb meadow. It demonstrates how successfully flowers naturalised in grass can work in a more compact space.

Caroline Thomson, a descendant of the Backhouse family, has spent the past 12 years rediscovering the Backhouse collection of daffodils following a suggestion from her mother that someone ought to collect the Backhouse plants, and record their history. Of the 956 Backhouse-bred cultivars listed on the RHS Daffodil register Caroline has found 84 confirmed plants and established a new National Collection. She has driven thousands of miles searching for plants and clues, once 'driving more than 500 miles through the night after supper to collect a true 'Mrs RO Backhouse'.' She shares her collection, an on-going project, with us.

I hope you enjoy the issue,

Lucy Bellamy

LUCY BELLAMY, EDITOR

ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Precious small things from Sissinghurst, in our new container planting series, page 46.

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Fritillaria elwesii by Richard Bloom

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- Your chance to win two places on a masterclass with Nigel Dunnett; plus the chance to win a STIHL cordless lawnmower, worth £369[†] – page 109
- Save £5 on three Sarah Raven dahlia collections[†] – page 111

[†] Competitions open to UK residents only.

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CLIVE NICHOLS
Clive photographed Morton Hall on page 76. *"I have been documenting the garden at Morton for the past two years but the fritillary meadow at dawn has to be the highlight."*

LYNN KEDDIE
Lynn met Brian Ellis to shoot his collection of wood anemones on page 62. *"Brian'senthusiasm was infectious and his knowledge impressive. Who knew that there were so many jewels?"*

JOHN HOYLAND
John visited the bulb-filled garden of Rod and Jane Leeds on page 38. *"It was great to visit Rod and Jane's garden: it is a dream place for a plant enthusiast, packed with treasures."*

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JAMES BASSON
James lives in the South of France where he runs Scape Design with his wife Helen and is a passionate advocate for dry gardens and for creating sustainable landscapes. The winner of four Chelsea Gold medals, he was awarded Best in Show in 2017.

FERGUS GARRETT
Fergus was appointed head gardener at Great Dixter by Christopher Lloyd in 1993. He is passionate about passing on his knowledge through student and volunteer programmes at Dixter and through worldwide lectures. He was awarded an RHS Associate of Honour in 2008.

ANNA PAVORD
Anna's books include her bestseller *The Tulip* and most recently *Landskipping*. For 30 years she was *The Independent*'s gardening correspondent. In 2000 the RHS awarded her the Veitch Memorial Medal. She lives and gardens in Dorset.

DAN PEARSON
Dan is one of the UK's best-known garden designers familiar to many through his gardening columns in the *Observer* magazine. Eight of his gardens, including the Tokachi Millennium Forest in Japan, have won awards and he was awarded Best in Show at Chelsea in 2015.

SARAH PRICE
Sarah is one of the UK's most sought-after garden designers who won worldwide recognition for her designs for the 2012 London Olympic Park. She won Gold at Chelsea in 2012 and was named 2016 Garden Columnist of the year by the GMG for her design series in *Gardens Illustrated*.

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Villa del Balbianello.

The Long Garden at David Austin Roses.

1-5 OCTOBER 2018

GARDENS OF THE ITALIAN LAKES

Our journey to the Italian Lakes, in the company of award-winning designer **Annie Guilfoyle**, will take us to some of the finest gardens of Lakes Como and Maggiore. We will travel mostly by boat, and while our days will be infused with exquisite light, by night we will revel in the *fin de siècle* atmosphere of our lakeside hotels. The warm, humid microclimate results in exceptional growing conditions, with much to enthuse the plantsman. Combining great botanical interest with the fascinating history of the gardens' origins, our tour will move from the Renaissance to the 20th century with visits including the baroque splendours of **Villa del Balbianello** and the historic gardens of **Villa Carlotta**. The tour culminates at **Orticolario**, an unusual, small garden festival near Como. We will be staying at two lovely lakeside hotels offering a perfect combination of elegance and charm.

BOOKING DETAILS

The price per person, based on two people sharing is £2,999 (a single supplement of £400 is levied by the hotels).

Price includes: two nights dinner, bed and breakfast at Grand Hotel Des Iles Borromees, Lake Maggiore and two nights dinner, bed and breakfast at Hotel Villa Flori, Lake Como; four evening meals with wines; plus two lunches and return flights London to Milan. The price does not include extras at either hotel, or travel insurance.

17-20 JUNE 2018

THE ENGLISH ROSE TOUR

If you love the perfume of roses on an early summer's day and have always longed to discover more of this vast and varied genus, this four-day tour is for you. The trip includes a visit to the new garden of your tour leader **Michael Marriott**, who is senior rosarian with David Austin roses. You'll also visit the outstanding **David Austin show garden** collection, plus enjoy a behind-the-scenes, private view of David Austin's own garden. **Powis Castle**, **Coughton Court**, **Ragley Hall** and **Wollerton Old Hall** complete the tour, all gardens with abundant rose displays – not forgetting the opportunity to meet author and gardener Katherine Swift at her garden at **Morville Hall**, where she will talk about her forthcoming book, *A Rose for Morville*. Visit beautiful gardens, discuss the merits of underplanting roses, mulching, pruning, budding, training, and above all celebrate the rose: doyenne of the English garden.

BOOKING DETAILS

The price per person, based on two people sharing is £1,995 (a single supplement of £150 is levied by the hotel).

Price includes: three nights dinner, bed and breakfast at Brockencote Hall near Kidderminster; three delicious evening meals with wines at the hotel; plus four lunches, including a rose-themed lunch and an organic rosé wine tasting; transportation between hotel and Shrewsbury Railway Station. The price does not include extras at the hotel, or travel insurance.

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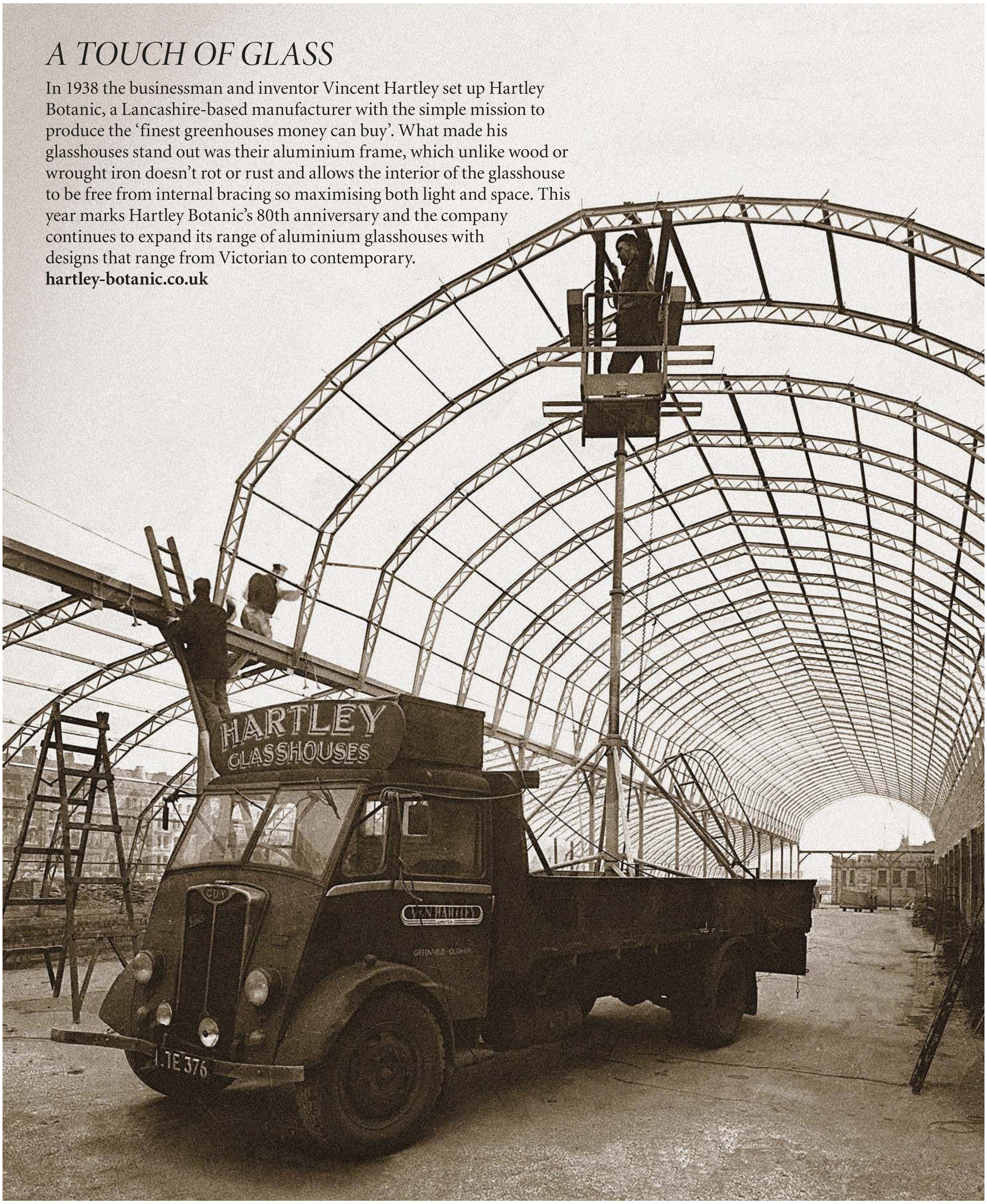
hartley-botanic.co.uk



News

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A MARCH ON SPRING

Hever Castle in Kent – the childhood home of Anne Boleyn – is celebrating all things daffodil this month. During its five-day Dazzling Daffodils event visitors can enjoy the 14,000 daffodils in bloom across the garden and discover more about the genus in a series of free talks from Johnny Walkers of Walkers' Bulbs. Johnny, the winner of 35 RHS gold medals, will also be sharing his encyclopedic knowledge of daffodils on tours of the historic estate, which includes a rare chance to see Anne Boleyn's Orchard with its impressive collection of bulbs. 21-25 March 2018. Tel 01732 865224, **hevercastle.co.uk**

CULTIVATING VIRTUE

Did you know that thyme is said to inspire courage or that asters symbolise love? You can discover more secrets of the language of flowers and help spread the word thanks to these new Seeds of Virtue Notecards from Rockett St George. Each notecard contains a short contemplation on a different virtue embodied by a flower, along with a packet of its seed to cultivate. There are two illustrated sets, each containing five notecards and envelopes and five different seeds – primrose, lavender, daisy, poppy and aster in the Flower set; thyme, fennel, basil, sage and rosemary in the Herb – and both are priced at £24. **rockettstgeorge.co.uk**

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March is the month to plant out dahlia tubers, or for a thriftier option sow dahlia seed indoors. One of the best to sow from seed is the seed mix Dahlia Bishop's Children, *which produces richly coloured, single-stemmed blooms – in a mix of colours from pink to blood red – that look fabulous against the dark-bronze foliage. They will flower in their first year and make a brilliant cut flower. Once the first season is over, you can save the tubers for the following year. Available from Chiltern Seeds, priced £2.25 for a packet of roughly 50 seeds.* ***chilternseeds.co.uk***

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NEW ROOTS

Seedlip, the company behind the first non-alcoholic spirits, is setting up an experimental nursery to extend its range of delicious plant-based drinks. Founder Ben Branson has appointed garden designer and trained horticulturist Tom Harfleet to develop a site on Ben's family farm in Lincolnshire where Seedlip can explore forgotten plants and new growing techniques. Seedlip currently has two spirits: the refreshing Garden 108 and citrusy Spice 94. ***seedlipdrinks.com***

EXOTIC ART

Visitors to New York this spring can marvel at the exotic beauty of orchids at the New York Botanical Garden's annual Orchid Show. This year's guest designer is the acclaimed Belgian floral artist Daniel Ost, who has created a series of floral installations using plants from both the NYBG's collections and international orchid growers. Admission to the show is included in the garden's entry price of $15. 3 March – 22 April, **nybg.org**

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❶ Snowdrop Festival
Catch the last of the snowdrop season at Hodsock Priory's snowdrop festival. There are daily talks at 2pm on the history of the garden and its impressive collection of snowdrops. Until 4 March, 10am-4pm. £5. Hodsock Priory, Blyth, Nottinghamshire S81 0TY. Tel 01909 591204, hodsockpriory.com

❷ A Celebration of Michael Wickenden
Michael Wickenden, the well-known plant hunter who died in 2016, is celebrated with an exhibition of his photographs featuring plants, people and landscapes. 1 March – 30 April, 10am-12pm. £6.50. Logan Botanic Garden, Port Logan, Stranraer, Dumfries & Galloway DG9 9ND. Tel 0776 860231, rbge.org.uk

❸ Early Spring Pruning
Master the basic principles of pruning on this practical half-day workshop at RHS Garden Hyde Hall. 12 March, 11am-1pm. £29. RHS Garden Hyde Hall, Creephedge Lane, Rettendon, Chelmsford, Essex CM3 8RA. Tel 01245 400256, rhs.org.uk

❹ Garden Day with Head Gardeners Tom Coward and Mat Reese
Join head gardeners Tom Coward, of Gravetye Manor, and Mat Reese, of Malverleys, for two fascinating talks. Tom will explain how he has restored Gravetye's Victorian kitchen garden, while Mat will reveal the secrets of creating and maintaining an English flower garden. 13 March, 10.30am-2.30pm. £70. Gravetye Manor, Kingscote Vineyard, Vowels Lane, East Grinstead RH19 4LG. Tel 01342 810567, gravetyemanor.co.uk

❺ Revealing Repton
Discover more about the great English landscape designer Humphry Repton in a lecture from Repton expert Stephen Daniels. The talk is part of the Gardens Trust bicentenary celebrations of Repton's life. 15 March, 6.30pm-8pm. Museum of Bath Architecture, The Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel, The Paragon, Bath BA1 5NA. Tel 01225 333895, thegardenstrust.org

❻ Ashwood Open Day
Don't miss the opportunity to admire John Massey's garden at Ashwood Nurseries, when it opens for charity this month. John's three-acre private garden alongside his renowned nursery is full of spring planting inspiration. 17 March, 10am-4pm. £5. Ashwood Nurseries, Ashwood Lower Lane, Kingswinford, West Midlands DY6 0AE. Tel 01384 401996, ashwoodnurseries.com

❼ The Art and Craft of Garden Design
Learn the fundamentals of garden design in this nine-month course led by Annie Guilfoyle. Held on one day a month in the inspiring setting of Great Dixter in East Sussex, the course includes seminars, demonstrations and practical design sessions, including some garden based. From 20 March. £1,200. Great Dixter, Northiam, Rye, East Sussex TN31 6PH. Tel 01797 254048, greatdixter.co.uk

❽ Magnolia Talk and Tour
Explore Borde Hill Garden's new magnolia grove in the company of magnolia expert Jim Gardiner. Jim, who chose the 48 specimen magnolia trees for the area named Gardiner Grove in his honour, will also advise on the best magnolias to grow and offer tips on planting and care. The new grove has been planted with hybrids of *Magnolia acuminata* and *Magnolia sprengeri* mixed with birch to celebrate the garden's 125th anniversary. 22 March, 10am-1.30pm. £26. Borde Hill Garden, Borde Hill Lane, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 1XP. Tel 01444 450326, bordehill.co.uk

❾ Hardy Plant Society – Early Spring Plant Fair
Browse interesting and usual plants stalls from some of the South West's top nurseries at this boutique plant fair set in the gardens created by Margery Fish. 24 March, 10am-4pm. £4. East Lambrook Manor Gardens, East Lambrook, South Petherton, Somerset TA13 5HH. Tel 01460 240328, eastlambrook.com

❿ SGD Spring Conference
Book now for the SGD Spring Conference on the theme: A Light Touch: The Expertise of Understatement. Speakers include Ulf Nordfjell, Rick Darke, Michael Vergason, Julie Bargman and Catherine Heatherington. 21 April. £146. Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR. Tel 0115 968 3188, sgd.org.uk

2 CHARLIE HOPKINSON, 6 JONATHAN NEED / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

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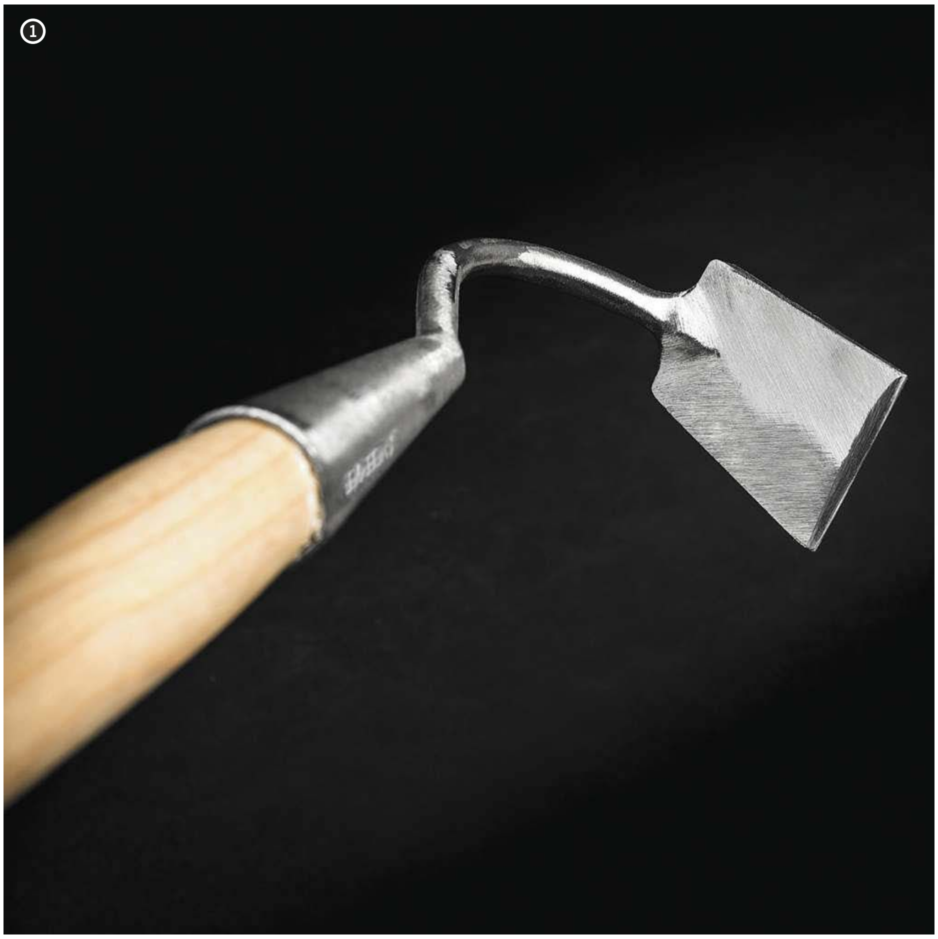

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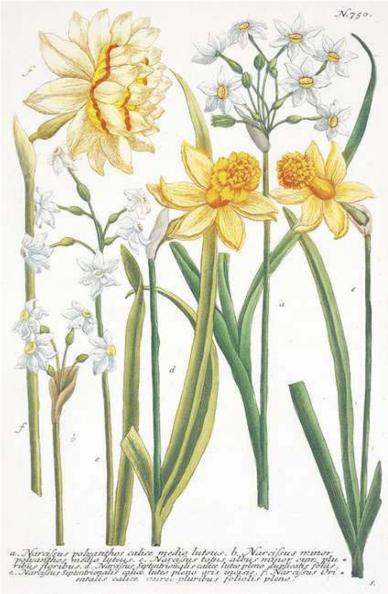

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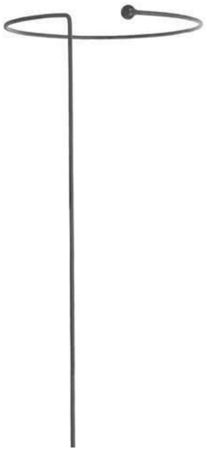

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MAIN IMAGE (THIS PAGE AND OVERLEAF) BY STEVE SAYERS

1. Sneeboer Ladies Border Hoe, £48.36, 020 7289 6851, clifton.co.uk **2. Barbour Barometer Waterproof Breathable Jacket in canary yellow,** £159, 0800 917 3000, barbour.com **3. Illustration of various Narcissi print by Johann Wilhelm Weinmann,** from £17.49, 020 8332 5000, prints.kew.org **4. Set of 2 Bud Vases – Recycled Glass,** £14, 01993 845559, gardentrading.co.uk **5. Ergo Deadheader,** £9.99, 0114 233 8262, burgonandball.com **6. Small Plant Box by Ferm Living (from top, dark grey, dusty blue, ochre),** £59 each, 0800 587 7645, amara.com **7. Barrington Full Hoop Plant Support,** £10, 01993 845559, gardentrading.co.uk

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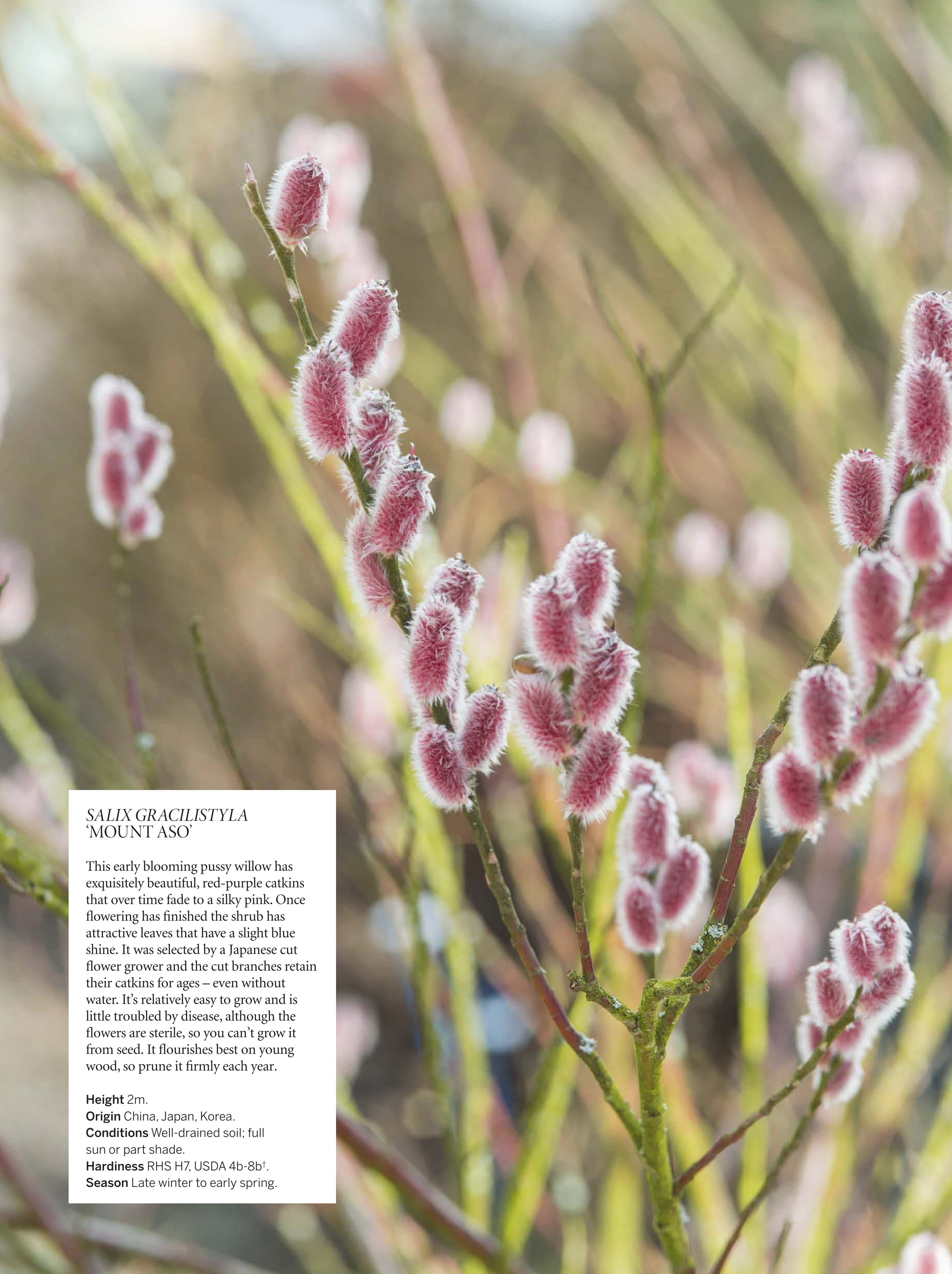


SALIX GRACILISTYLA 'MOUNT ASO'

This early blooming pussy willow has exquisitely beautiful, red-purple catkins that over time fade to a silky pink. Once flowering has finished the shrub has attractive leaves that have a slight blue shine. It was selected by a Japanese cut flower grower and the cut branches retain their catkins for ages – even without water. It's relatively easy to grow and is little troubled by disease, although the flowers are sterile, so you can't grow it from seed. It flourishes best on young wood, so prune it firmly each year.

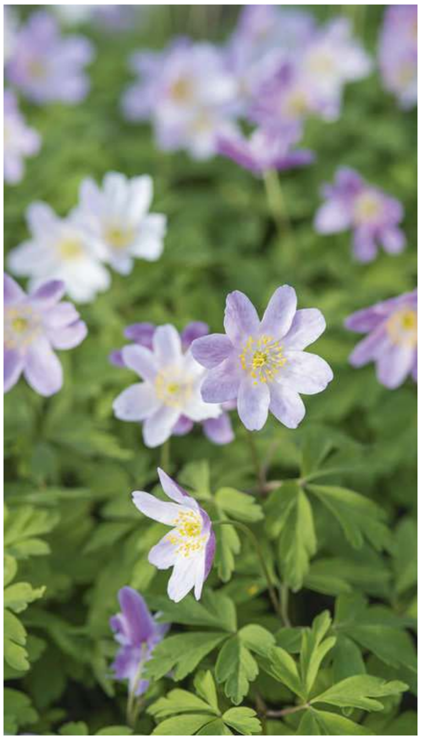
Height 2m.
Origin China, Japan, Korea.
Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4b-8b[†].
Season Late winter to early spring.

Fleur van Zonneveld runs the Dutch nursery De Kleine Plantage. **dekleineplantage.nl**

MARCH PLANTS

Come March, Fleur is seeking colour to banish the grey days of winter, and chooses ten plants that help brighten the lengthening days of early spring

WORDS **FLEUR VAN ZONNEVELD** PHOTOGRAPHS **MAAYKE DE RIDDER**



ANEMONE NEMOROSA 'KENTISH PINK'

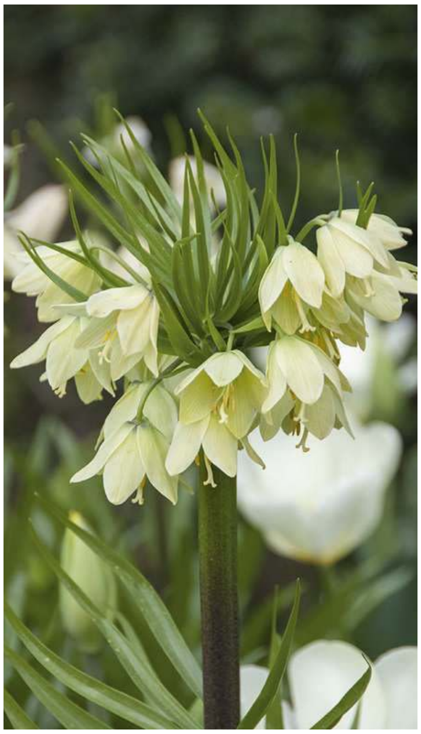
I'm always amazed that *Anemone nemorosa* doesn't generate the same levels of excitement as snowdrops. These wood anemone offer far more variation – the Austrian breeder Christian Kress has a collection of 140 types – and naturalise well. This cultivar is almost white but the backs of the petal-like sepals are pink, so in full sun it looks like a typical, white wood anemone, but when light is low, and the flowers start to close, its appearance changes completely. In some lights the flowers can appear dark pink.

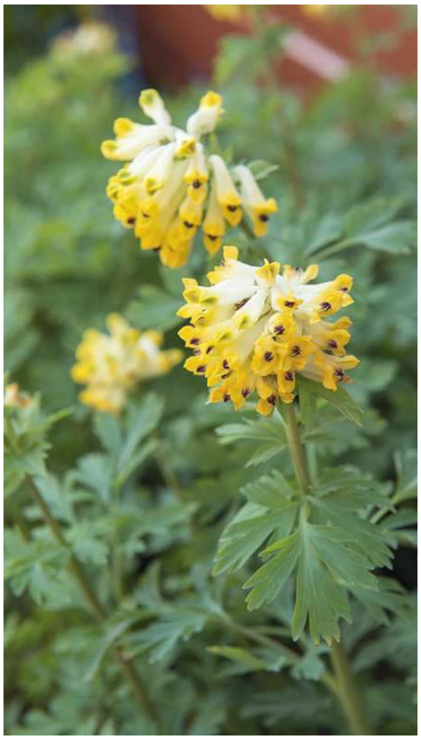
Height 20cm.
Origin Western Europe
Conditions Well-drained, humus-rich soil; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.
Season Spring.

FRITILLARIA RADDEANA

Fritillaries feel like an unstoppable force of nature. You turn away for a couple of days and then suddenly there are numerous new stems with shiny green foliage. This fritillary's flowers have a beautifully subtle, lime-green colour, which fits perfectly into spring's colour palette. They're also large, making this a very striking plant. It is one of the first fritillaries to flower and prefers well-drained soil and hot dry summers. After flowering, it evolves into large, angular seedpods that look wonderful when used in flower arrangements.

Height 70cm.
Origin Central Asia.
Conditions Well-drained, humus-rich soil; full sun or part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.
Season Spring.





CORYDALIS NOBILIS

In his book *Garden Myths,* Robert Pavlis describes how the botanist Carl Linnaeus received some incorrectly labelled seeds that he planted out in his garden. They turned out to be *Corydalis nobilis*, and from his garden in Sweden the plant has now naturalised all over much of northern Europe. I find this a beautiful story for a beautiful plant. It's one of the largest corydalis with striking yellow-brown flowers. Most plants need some heat to see a real spurt of growth, but this plant benefits from cold to form up a solid plant. If spring is too warm it slows and collapses.

Height 50cm.
Origin Altai Mountains and central Asia.
Conditions Dry to moderately moist soil; full sun.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3b-8b.
Season Spring.

* Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. † Hardiness ratings given where available.

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CORNUS MAS 'JOLICO'

After the greyness of winter, we often crave a little colour. But spring colour is much more welcome if it appears gradually, which is why the subtle beauty of this yellow *Cornus mas* is so much more appealing than the bright yellow of the ubiquitous forsythias. *Cornus mas* 'Jolico' is an older selection from Vienna and has only recently been rediscovered. Its bloom is richer and more intense than the usual *Cornus mas* and its dark-red fruits are much bigger – and delicious when turned into a jam. It also has fine autumn colour. AGM*.

Height 4m.
Origin Europe, western Asia.
Conditions Medium moisture, well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Season Flowers spring.

CARDAMINE TRIFOLIA

Most cuckoo flowers are deciduous plants; this is the evergreen exception. It forms whole mats of three-lobed, dark-green leaves, but as leaves age their underside fades to purple due to the presence of water-soluble pigments known as anthocyanins. It is a lovely plant that can be used to mask the transition between a path and a border. It is also happy in full shade and completely at home under trees especially forming a carpet with a few ferns, such as *Osmunda regalis* 'Purpurascens', in between, or under a group of polygonatums and disporums.

Height 20cm.
Origin Southern and central Europe.
Conditions Moist, humus-rich soil; full or part shade.
Hardiness RHS H5, USDA 7b-9b.
Season Spring.

PHYSOCHLAINA ORIENTALIS

An unusual plant that can be quite hard to source. Its large, triangular leaves held on long stems look a little like those of the American pokeweed, but this comes from the same family as the potato (*Solanaceae*). It has deep roots so can tolerate quite dry conditions. The plant is also very strong and likes nutritious soil in part shade. Its smoky purple flowers look a little out of place among the fresh colours of most spring plants, and most unusually once the plant has finished blooming, and the bees have taken their fill, the plant disappears. Don't worry it's not dead; it is just dormant from summer to spring.

Height 40cm.
Origin Caucasus, Turkey, Iran.
Conditions Well-drained soil; part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 3b-11.
Season Spring.

PLACES TO VISIT

Recommended places to see seasonal plants at their best both in Europe and the UK

One of the most famous parks for native plants in the Netherlands is **Thijssepark** near Amsterdam. It's what in the Netherlands we call a *heemtuin*, a semi-wild landscape intended to show off indigenous wild flora and fauna at their best. It's a concept that was first introduced in the 1920s by the famous Dutch biologist and conservationist Jac P Thijsse, after whom this park is named. Thijsse did much to popularise nature and conservation in the Netherlands and one of the ideas behind the parks was to encourage visitors, especially school children, to enjoy nature and learn to appreciate the richness of the country's natural flora.

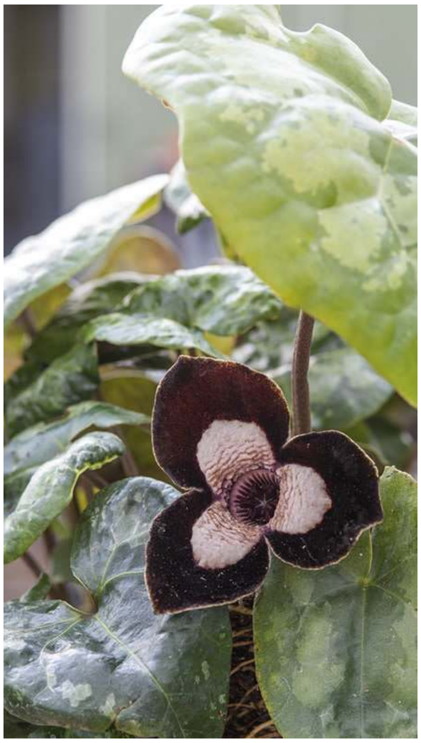
When we started our nursery in the early 1980s, we had initially planned to create a nursery that specialised in what are known in the Netherlands as *stinzenplanten* – plants that were introduced to the Netherlands from around the 16th century onwards that we now think of as native. These are combined with native flora to great effect in the Thijssepark. Hein Koningen, who for many years was the park's administrator, supplied us with such plants that we're still using to propagate from.

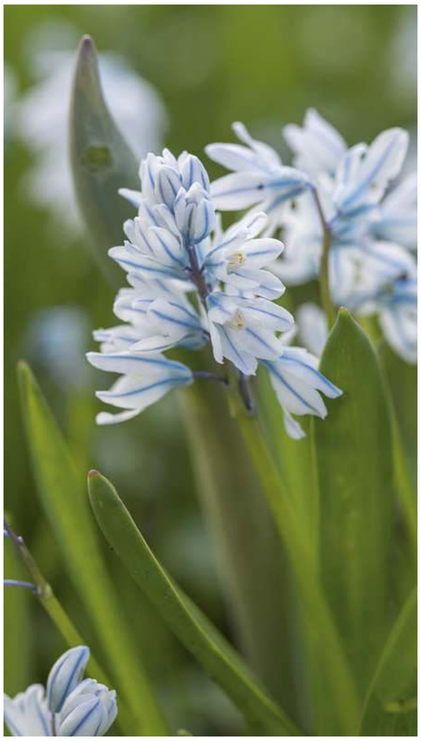
A lot of research work is undertaken at Thijssepark with different biotopes and closed plant communities. But it is also a lovely park to wander around, with an undulating landscape combining woodland, small lakes and meadows. It also has the largest collection of native plants and *stinzenplanten*, including ▷

ASARUM DELAVAYI GIANT

A mysterious-looking plant with beautiful, shiny foliage that is slightly marbled. Look beneath these, evergreen leaves and you'll find velvety, brown-black flowers with a large white centre looking back at you. No surprise then its common name is panda face wild ginger. The rootstocks are used in Chinese medicine (even though they're toxic and also carcinogenic). Although slow growing, it makes a beautiful groundcover. Placing it in a pot on an outdoor table is a good way to discourage slugs and the best way to enjoy its incredible flowers.

Height 20cm.
Origin China.
Conditions Moist but well-drained soil; full sun to part shade.
Hardiness RHS H6, USDA 8a-9b.
Season Spring.





PUSCHKINIA SCILLOIDES VAR. *LIBANOTICA*

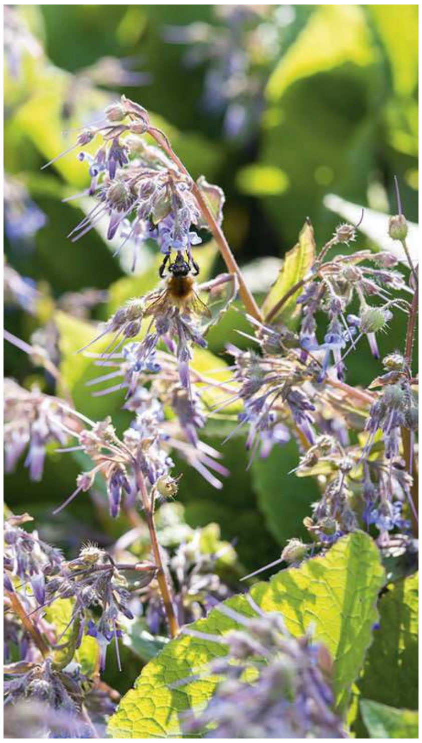
The watery, pale-blue colour of this tiny little plant looks remarkable when massed plantings are viewed from a distance in early spring. Even when the weather is overcast flowers are wide open. It naturalises easily and doesn't get in the way of later emerging plants. It's best grown in drifts under deciduous trees or in a border. Plant en masse alongside fellow *stinzenplanten* [see page 25] *Chionodoxa forbesii* and *Primula vulgaris* and you will have an eye-catching, colourful spring display.

Height 10cm.
Origin Caucasus, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon.
Conditions Well-drained soil; full sun or part shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.
Season Spring.

TRACHYSTEMON ORIENTALIS

The blue flowers have curled endings on the petals that look like little propellers with a sharp point. Flowers appear before the hairy, heart-shaped, rough leaves that will quickly cover large surfaces making it an excellent groundcover plant and extremely valuable for naturalistic schemes. It needs a moist soil and in drier periods the leaf will quickly hang down. However, it does well in the shade of trees, and can easily be combined with tall plants, such as *Polygonatum biflorum* and *Aralia continentalis*. All parts of the plant are edible and often eaten in its native Turkey.

Height 30cm.
Origin Eastern Europe, Turkey.
Conditions Fresh to moist soil; part to full shade.
Hardiness RHS H7, USDA 6a-9b.
Season Spring.



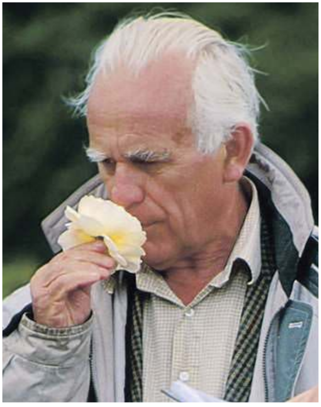
▷ scilla, erythroniums, *Corydalis cava* and *Corydalis solida*, Prins Bernhardlaan 8 1182 BE Amstelveen, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)20 5404911, thijssepark.nl

Another Dutch garden, and one not far from our own in Groningen, is **Tuinfleur**. This private garden on the shores of the Oldambt Lake is made up of 12 areas. It's famous for its snowdrops collection, but in spring there are thousands of bulbs in bloom and the garden also has a large collection of rare shade-loving plants, including more than 600 kinds of hosta. Well worth a visit. Nieuweweg 34, 9682 RM Oostwold, Gem Oldambt, the Netherlands. Tel +31 (0)597 551383, tuinfleur.nl

In the UK I'd recommend **Hergest Croft Gardens**, which is close to the Welsh border in Herefordshire. The gardens are lovely and offer fabulous views over the Black Mountains. In March and April the blue scillas and snowdrops give way to a host of white, yellow and trumpet daffodils. Ridgebourne Road, Kington, Herefordshire HR5 3EG. Tel 01544 230160, hergest.co.uk

One of our favourite UK nurseries in **Marchants Hardy Plants** on the South Downs. It's an invaluable nursery, and we've known its owner, the very knowledgeable Graham Gough, since he was Elizabeth Strangman's right-hand man at the famous Washfield Nursery in the early 1980s. We still grow and propagate some of the plants we received from him at that time. The nursery is a treasure trove offering a superb range of healthy, well-grown perennials. The nursery is open from March and from May to October you can also visit Graham's garden, which though not large is well designed and diversely planted. We love it.
2 Marchants Cottages,
Mill Lane, Laughton, Lewes,
East Sussex BN8 6AJ.
Tel 01323 811737,
marchantshardyplants.co.uk

Roald Dahl (*Ausowlish*)



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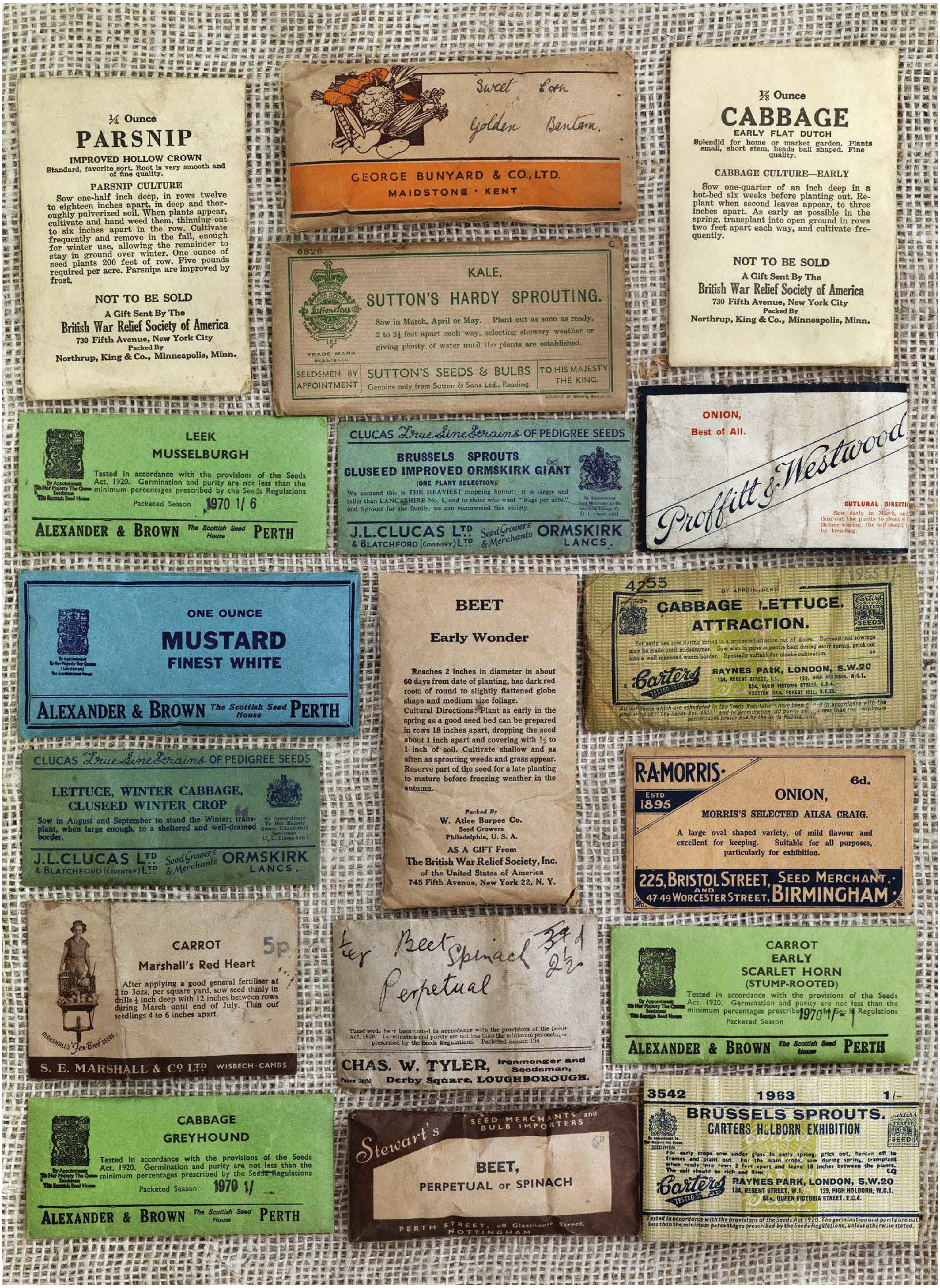

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If you're looking for inspiration for this year's crop of annuals and vegetables, take a look at our selection of the best seed suppliers

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Flowers

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The Chiltern Seeds catalogue is always tempting with a selection of inspiring images. Cultivar choice is excellent and descriptions always helpful. You might try *Lobularia maritima* 'Paletta Salmon' – a new colouring that brings a lease of new life to this traditional bedding favourite. There's a selection of seed for green manuring plants, too. Look out for the companion vegetable catalogue sporting characterful illustrations and a similarly good range of cultivars. **chilternseeds.co.uk**

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GREAT DIXTER

If you've visited this iconic garden, you'll have been delighted by its sheer exuberance, colour and range of plants through the season. The nursery offers flower seeds from its own stock chosen by the staff and students as notable. Seed is then harvested fresh by hand and supplied in glassine bags. The range includes some of the plants that define Dixter, such as the exceptional *Amaranthus* and *Papaver* 'Lauren's Grape'. **greatdixtershop.co.uk**

HIGGLEDY GARDEN

Grower and owner Benjamin Ranyard trials a selection of flowers at this field in Cornwall. He then sells a range of seed specifically for the cutting patch – sometimes working with florists to ensure the best range. The focus is on traditional annuals and biennials, chosen for their range of colour, form, texture, longevity, and stem strength and length. Ben is also active on social media and encourages response from his customers, which acts as a source of useful advice. The Higgledy website also has plenty of growing tips and a monthly planting guide. **higgledygarden.com**

PLANT WORLD SEEDS

Extensive range of seeds for flowers and vegetables but also trees and shrubs and grasses – many of them rare and unusual. It stocks 209 cultivars of tomato alone – ranging from the wonderfully coloured to the beautifully shaped. Bespoke packets are available should you want to mark a special occasion with your own seed selection. It ships around the world. **plant-world-seeds.com**

PLANTS OF DISTINCTION

A small, family-run business based in Suffolk that has built up a good range of both flower and vegetables that rivals some of the larger, more commercial seed companies. **plantsofdistinction.co.uk**

SARAH RAVEN

Sarah is renowned for her carefully curated collections of traditional flowers for her cutting garden. Her seed selection is relatively small but you can be assured that those she has included are good ones. Sarah's collections are also tempting for the combination planting ideas they offer. *Calendula officinalis* 'Touch of Red Buff' is new to her list this year and caught our eye. **sarahraven.com**

SPECIAL PLANTS

Plantswoman Derry Watkins runs a fantastic nursery in a hidden valley near Bath. Her plant selection is impeccable and you'll always find something of interest there. Added to which, she sells a range of flower seed too. Of particular note is her fresh seed. These are only available seasonally for seeds that need to be harvested and planted when fresh to ensure germination. Sign up for an alert to make sure you don't miss the moment. **specialplants.net**

THOMPSON & MORGAN

Established in 1855, Thompson & Morgan has a wide range of seed for flowers and vegetables, regularly winning awards for its offerings. You'll find plenty of choice on cultivars and good descriptions. Some seed are available on seed tape for easy planting. Thompson & Morgan is also now working with potato expert Alan Romans. His selection of seed potatoes is well worth noting. **thompson-morgan.com**

UNWINS

Another of the big all-rounders with a wide range of seed – many offered as part of special deals – so worth keeping an eye out for seasonal promotions. Unwins is best known for its range of sweet peas, and has an ongoing breeding programme and extensive sweet pea trials each year. **unwins.co.uk**

Vegetables

HERITAGE SEED LIBRARY

Run by Garden Organic, the Heritage Seed Library is a members-only resource that offers a selection of rare, hard-to-get-hold-of, heritage vegetable seed – many of which have been lost to standard seed catalogues. The aim is to maintain as much genetic diversity as possible and ensure these unusual vegetables continue to be grown. You can also opt to become a guardian yourself and provide seed for the library and its members. **hsl.gardenorganic.org.uk**

JEKKA'S HERB FARM

The award-winning grower, expert and herb-garden designer, Jekka McVicar's knowledge of growing herbs is second to none. This is perhaps the best range of culinary herb seed anywhere, including salad herb seeds plus herb collections in beautifully illustrated packets, perfect as inspiring gifts. **jekkasherbfarm.com**

KINGS SEEDS

Much of Kings Seeds stock comes from its own 300-acre farm. Good selection of vegetables and flower cultivars, including an organic range of ▷

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Garden Masterclasses

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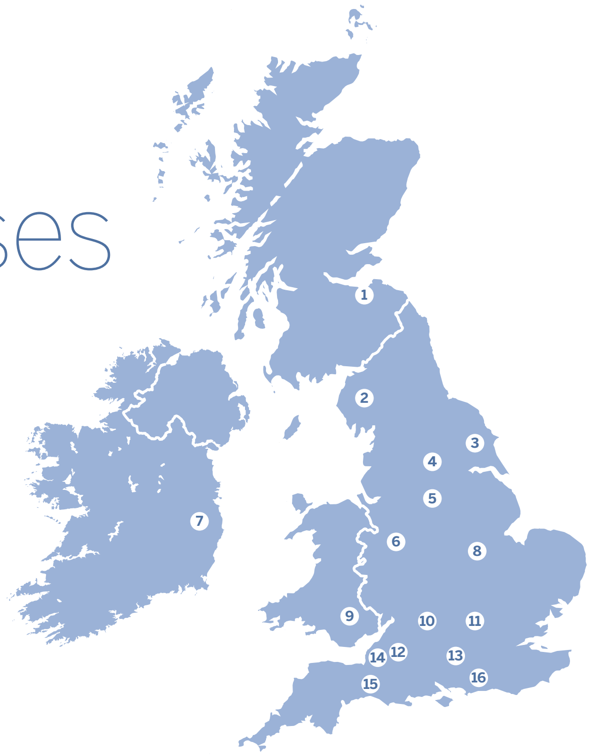
Garden Masterclasses aim to bring together gardeners and designers with some of the most innovative people in the gardening world through one-day workshops. Each workshop is organised around a specific topic, and designed to help students learn and practise. With quality catering, in garden or nursery venues, we hope that students will have a good day out too, meeting other passionate gardeners, and sharing experiences.

ANNIE GUILFOYLE AND NOËL KINGSBURY, MASTERCLASS ORGANISERS



2018 workshop dates and venues: *unless noted all days run from 10am-4.30pm*

- WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL £130
Walled Garden Treberfydd, Powys (9).
Planting design basics with Sarah Price & Noel Kingsbury.
- WEDNESDAY 2 MAY £130
Easton Walled Gardens, Lincolnshire (8).
What makes a successful garden? with Annie Guilfoyle & Ursula Cholmeley.
- SATURDAY 12 MAY (10.30AM-5PM) £140
Forde Abbey, Dorset (15).
Garden Masterclass Spring Event with Anna Pavord, Keith Wiley & Harriet Rycroft.
- TUESDAY 15 MAY £140
The Coach House Garden, Gloucestershire (10).
Secrets of successful summer containers with Harriet Rycroft.
- MONDAY 4 JUNE £140
Parham House and Gardens, West Sussex (16).
Parham House through the lens – a photography workshop with Jason Ingram.
- WEDNESDAY 6 JUNE £140
Yeo Valley Organic Garden, Somerset (14).
The immersive experience, planting design at the human scale with Dr. Nigel Dunnett.
- WEDNESDAY 13 JUNE £140
Trentham Gardens, Staffordshire (6).
Dynamic Planting at Trentham with Dr. Nigel Dunnett.
- MONDAY 9 JULY £140
Bury Court, Hampshire (13).
Generative planting design for the 21st century with James and Helen Basson.
- THURSDAY 19 JULY £125
Scampston Walled Garden, North Yorkshire (3).
Using grasses and perennials in the modern garden with Neil Lucas.
- WEDNESDAY 25 JULY £140
Waterperry Gardens, Oxfordshire (11).
Gardens through the lens – a photography workshop with Jason Ingram.
- MONDAY 3 SEPTEMBER £130
Parham House and Gardens, West Sussex (16).
Creating and developing a late summer border with Tom Brown & Marina Christopher.
- TUESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER £140
Arvensis Perennials, Wiltshire (12).
A collaborative approach to design and planting with Charlotte Harris and Hugo Bugg.
- THURSDAY 13 SEPTEMBER £110
Walled Garden Treberfydd, Powys (9).
Pruning – a beginner's guide with Mary Payne.
- TUESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER £130
The Coach House Garden, Gloucestershire (10).
The rabbit's eye view – learning about long-term plant performance with Noel Kingsbury.
- THURSDAY 20 SEPTEMBER £90
Stillingfleet Lodge Gardens, Yorkshire (4).
The rabbit's eye view – learning about long-term plant performance with Noel Kingsbury.
- SATURDAY 22 SEPTEMBER £90
Sheffield Botanical Gardens, South Yorkshire (5).
The rabbit's eye view – learning about long-term plant performance with Noel Kingsbury.
- WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER £130
Fairnielaw House, East Lothian (1).
Plants First with Sarah Price.
- WEDNESDAY 26 SEPTEMBER £130
Hunting Brook Gardens, Co. Wicklow, Eire (7).
Understanding plants – choosing and using for long-term impact with Jimi Blake & Noel Kingsbury.
- TUESDAY 9 OCTOBER £140
Parham House and Gardens, West Sussex (16).
Lightroom and post production for garden and plant photographers with Jason Ingram.
- FRIDAY 19 OCTOBER (10.30AM-5PM) £140
Forde Abbey, Dorset (15).
Garden Masterclass Autumn Event with Rosy Hardy, Derry Watkins and Sarah Price.
- WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER £130
Larch Cottage Gardens, Cumbria (2).
What makes a successful garden? with Annie Guilfoyle.
- WEDNESDAY 7 NOVEMBER £140
Yeo Valley Organic Gardens, Somerset (14).
Lightroom and post production for garden and plant photographers with Jason Ingram.

For booking and details of all workshops go to
gardenmasterclass.org
or email gardenmasterclass@gmail.com

Workshops with James and Helen Basson, Jimi Blake, Tom Brown, Hugo Bugg & Charlotte Harris, Ursula Cholmeley, Marina Christopher, Dr. Nigel Dunnett, Annie Guilfoyle, Rosy Hardy, Jason Ingram, Dr Noel Kingsbury, Neil Lucas, Rob Macdougall, Anna Pavord, Mary Payne, Sarah Price, Harriet Rycroft, Derry Watkins and Keith Wiley.

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URSULA CHOLMELEY PORTRAIT BY FRED CHOLMELEY

▷ vegetable seed. It also stocks the range from Suffolk Herbs. **kingsseeds.com**

MARSHALLS

A good all-rounder, with plenty of choice covering a range of different vegetables. The duo packs, with two complementary cultivars, are a great way to discover more of the variety available within one vegetable type and benefit from an extended harvesting season or variations in flavour. **marshalls-seeds.co.uk**

MOLE SEEDS

This fully independent seed merchant has a good range of seeds including organic vegetables – in fact the majority of its flower seed are untreated too. Although wholesale, it will supply anyone from large companies to individual enthusiasts (minimum order value £7.50) with the advantage here that seeds are available in a range of larger quantities – so perfect if you are part of an allotment club or gardening group. **wholesale.moleseeds.co.uk**

PENNARD PLANTS

Pennard offers over 600 varieties of heirloom and heritage vegetables – again with a focus on flavour. You may have seen its award-winning displays at garden events such as the RHS Chelsea Flower Show, which often show an exuberant allotment-style garden, growing everything from traditional or forgotten favourites to more unusual newcomers. Good selection of kales for those following its return to favour, but wanting to try something other than the standard green curly kale available in shops. **pennardplants.com**

REAL SEEDS

Founded by a pair of grow-your-own obsessives who started supplying seed as a result of their own extensive trials of growing vegetables for above all flavour. All seeds are non-hybrid (open pollinated) and you are encouraged to save your own seed from one year to the next. This year it has reintroduced the pea 'Magnum Bonum', a tall, heritage, maincrop cultivar dating back to 1872, with pretty, white flowers and an excellent sweet taste. **realseeds.co.uk**

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SEA SPRING SEEDS

A vegetable seed company based in Dorset. According to no-dig expert Charles Dowding it stocks 'only seeds that grow into decent flavours and have useful growth characteristics, such as yield and earliness of harvest.' It also has a particularly good range of interesting chillies. **seaspringseeds.co.uk**

SEEDS OF ITALY

You'll be hard pressed not to be drawn in to the colour and flavour on offer in a whole range of tasty Italian cultivars. The details of provenance too remind you that local specialities remain important and can define regional cooking. Seeds of Italy is the sole UK supplier of Franchi Seeds – one of the world's oldest seed suppliers established in 1783 – and now has a shop in north London where you can buy seeds and other Italian gourmet goods. There's a range of organic, chemical-free seed available, too. **seedsofitaly.com**

SUTTONS

Nice, clear website that makes it easy to find what you want from Suttons' all-round range of seeds. It also works with ethnobotanist James Wong to offer a range of vegetables and edible flower seeds that James has chosen for their focus on flavour and high nutritional value. **suttons.co.uk**

TAMAR ORGANICS

The company started as a small organic garden in 1994 and now offers a good range of products for the organic gardener, including vegetable seeds, herbs, onion sets and seed potatoes. This year it has added to its range with edamame beans, a pink-stemmed pak choi Vivid Choi and further micro greens. Flower seed is also available. **tamarorganics.co.uk**

THOMAS ETTY

Known for his impeccable etiquette, you'll be charmed to receive Thomas Etty Esq's regular missives, respectfully suggesting seeds to buy and sow. You'll find an interesting range of heritage cultivars among his choice. There is, however, a minumum order value of £12.50. **thomasetty.co.uk**

Wildflowers

EMORSGATE SEEDS

Run by committed botanists and ecologists to promote the importance not just of growing more wildflowers but of working with nature. Its wildflower and grass mixes are grouped by habitat, such as meadow, and then by soil type so you get the right mix of species for your area. Excellent whether you're creating a large meadow area or simply want to increase the biodiversity in your garden. **wildseed.co.uk**

PICTORIAL MEADOWS

Seed mixes for annual and perennial meadow-style planting. These were originally developed by Nigel Dunnett from his work at the University of Sheffield and are aimed to provide impact of colour and lots of nectar-rich flower sources. They succeed on average garden soil, making it much easier to get results. **pictorialmeadows.co.uk**

Other resources

SEED SWAPS

If you are looking for recommended, locally suited, unusual cultivars of flowers and vegetables, try researching community seed swapping events. These are a great opportunity to meet other growers, hear first-hand of growing experiences and discover new favourites.

MILLENNIUM SEED BANK

And finally, a word for the wonder of seeds and the biodiversity they represent. The Millennium Seed Bank, at Wakehurst Place in Sussex, is Kew's project to conserve 25 per cent of the world's seeds by 2020 to ensure against future extinction. See the website to find out more and discover the amazing science behind seeds. **kew.org/wakehurst**

The Outsider

Hills clothed in beech and oak forests, dusty, green scrubland concealing mini-meadows and wild asparagus for picking. Hannah Gardner discovers Istria's diverse habitats pay little heed to national boundaries

WORDS **HANNAH GARDNER** ILLUSTRATIONS **ALICE PATTULLO**

Istria, the large heart-shaped peninsula at the head of the Adriatic, is politically divided between Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. Ancient ports and picturesque fishing villages are dotted along the now tranquil coast (the region has a turbulent history). Remote medieval villages, ancient ruins and candlelit, fresco-filled churches hide in the rolling hills.

Natural habitats are diverse, with Mediterranean grassland and *maquis* dominating the low-altitude coastal areas. The pristine, 360-hectare Kamenjak National Park is the highlight, especially if you appreciate orchids. The inland hills are karst, formed from the dissolution of soluble rocks. Limestone cliffs conceal sprawling underground drainage systems. Caves and dramatic sinkholes (known locally as *dolines*) are common. The hills are clothed in beech and oak forests with an abundant floral understorey in spring.

Inspiration for the trip

It was fungi that led me to Istria. I enjoy the earthiness and exoticism of truffles, but had never tasted the covetable white truffle, or *trifola d'Alba Madonna* (*Tuber magnatum*). Truffles, both black and white, grow abundantly in the forests here.

When to go

This botanically rich area is stunning in spring. Visit over Easter when there are posies of wild flowers and blown eggshells decorated with pussy willow buds on sale in the markets. On our trip, my young daughter and I were invited to family feasts in eateries known as *konobas*.

Where to go

Approaching from Slovenia, we crossed into Croatia on a minor road leading to the prosperous truffle town of Buzet in the Mirna Valley. This high, limestone frontier ridge has spectacular views and endless hiking and botanising opportunities. In forest clearings, among the more familiar violas, woodland spurge, sprawling lesser periwinkle and mounds of wild primrose, I discovered plentiful stands of the floriferous *Helleborus multifidus* subsp. *istriacus*, a tall, nodding, green hellebore endemic to Istria.

Growing alongside was *Galanthus nivalis*, part of the vibrant and resilient woodland tapestry. Taking advantage of the early season moisture, *Anemone nemorosa*, *Corydalis angustifolia*, *Pulmonaria visianii*, *Scilla bifolia*, the beguiling dog's tooth violet (*Erythronium dens-canis*) and crocuses too numerous (and tricky) to name jostled for position in the rough open ground.

Further into the shade, *Lamium orvala* offered its soft vintage-pink flowers in artful contrast to the stiff, emerging pleats of *Veratrum album*. We collected a generous bundle of wild asparagus (*Asparagus acutifolius*) and continued south on single-track mountain roads, passing gnarled ancient trees, deserted villages and several species of stunning bee orchid (*Ophrys*). It was truly an inspiring place.

The 15th-century chapel of Sveta Marija na Škrilinama near Beram is worth a detour. Approached through woodland (find the key holder in the village first), it contains some of the most complete and beautiful frescoes in Croatia. No electricity and few tourists.

Continue south to reach the protected Kamenjak Peninsula and be free to wander. The dusty, evergreen scrubland conceals diverse mini-meadows featuring *Euphorbia cyparissias*, *Ononis viscosa* and the pastel-pink form of *Anemone pavonina* to name but a few, as well as many orchids.

Plants to grow at home

Bright clouds of *Cornus mas* lit up the wooded Istrian hills. I had never seen it like this before – luminescent, wild and unfettered. I found it growing alongside the smoke tree *Cotinus coggygria*, a wonderful association. A member of the dogwood tribe, this cornelian cherry has many attractive features. It is a hardy, deciduous large shrub/small tree that in spring carries small, yolk-yellow umbel flowers held in clusters on dense, naked branches. Autumn brings deep-purple foliage and bright-red, edible fruits that are collected by the basketful throughout eastern and southern Europe and used to make sauces and preserves.

It's also worth considering cultivars of *Cornus mas*. 'Golden Glory' flowers more prolifically than the species, and at a younger age. 'Variegata' has a thick, white margin to its leaves and a reputation for more generous berries, although in truth it is a long, hot summer that maximises the crop. Note that the variegated cultivars grow more slowly, which can be an advantage, and require more shelter.

Early flowering shrubs are enhanced by underplanting. Be inspired by natural associations: snowdrops, crocuses, scillas and hellebores grow well under *Cornus mas*. Autumn *Cyclamen hederifolium* will give late-season interest and a late-flowering clematis, such as *C.* 'Gravetye Beauty', will scramble happily through its branches.

Guides and maps

Flowers of Greece and the Balkans: A Field Guide by Oleg Polunin (Oxford Paperbacks, 1987)
KOMPASSS #238 Istria (Croatia) Hiking & Cycling Map 1:75,000 (2011)
Marco Polo Atlas Slovenia/Croatia/ Bosnia (2014)

Where to stay

For hotels try:
Stancija 1904, Smoljanci 2, 52342 Svetvincenat, Istria, Croatia. Tel +385 52 560022, stancija.com, or
Hotel Kaštel, Trg Andrea Antico 7, 52424 Motovun, Istria, Croatia. Tel +385 52 681607, hotel-kastel-motovun.hr.
Inland, there is a good selection of Airbnb and agritourism offerings (*agrotourizam*), but make sure you find a good local *konoba*, and I can highly recommend. Rino, Dolinja Vas 23, 52462 Momjan, Istria, Croatia. Tel +385 52 779170, prelac.hr

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GARDENING TALENT

Charlie Harpur

Previously a designer with Tom Stuart-Smith, Charlie is now getting plenty of hands-on gardening experience at Kew as he works towards his diploma

PORTRAIT ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Earliest gardening memory My first recollection of gardens is as a five-year-old, exploring the late, great Jill Cowley's garden in Essex, which drew in visitors by the thousands for the National Garden Scheme. My grandmother would make the cakes and I'd be left to enjoy getting lost in that space of wonder.

First plant love Stumbling upon a carpet of jewel-like spring squill (*Scilla verna*) while clambering around Gurnard's Head peninsula in Cornwall at a young age inspired my first plant obsession.

Who has inspired you? My grandfather Jerry Harpur started Harpur Garden Images photography business with my uncle Marcus Harpur in 1992. Jerry would travel all over the world taking beautiful photographs of exotic spaces, and would recount some fairly wild stories to accompany them. Their talent and creativity, as well as the exposure to landscape and design, helped prompt my career direction. Marcus sadly passed away last year and I miss him dearly.

Favourite planting style I have become interested in how native plant species can be used to create ecologically beneficial places.

Your career path to horticulture I trained as an architect prior to joining Tom Stuart-Smith's landscape design team. Tom kindly gave me more and more work with plants, as opposed to the architectural side of design. After a few years, I felt the need to gain some hands-on experience, so I took time out to work as an intern at the Chelsea Physic Garden, before applying for the Kew Diploma.

Dream plant destination I am a tree man, and the temperate rainforests of the Pacific North-West provide a great deal of daydreaming at the moment. Diploma travel scholarships are coming up, so maybe dreams will become a reality.

Unsung plant hero Our native trees are often dismissed, which is a real shame. The English oak *Quercus robur* for example; it's rarely planted unless in a large area of parkland. Plant more native trees!

Biggest challenge facing gardeners today Young people rarely seem to consider horticulture because they think it is underpaid and unfashionable. Ambra Edwards' recent book *Head Gardeners* is on point, and quotes Mike Calnan of the National Trust saying: 'It's difficult to imagine a class of people who have tremendous skills, who contribute so much to society, and who are so thoroughly undervalued'.

Contact harpurgardens@gmail.com. Instagram charlie.harpur

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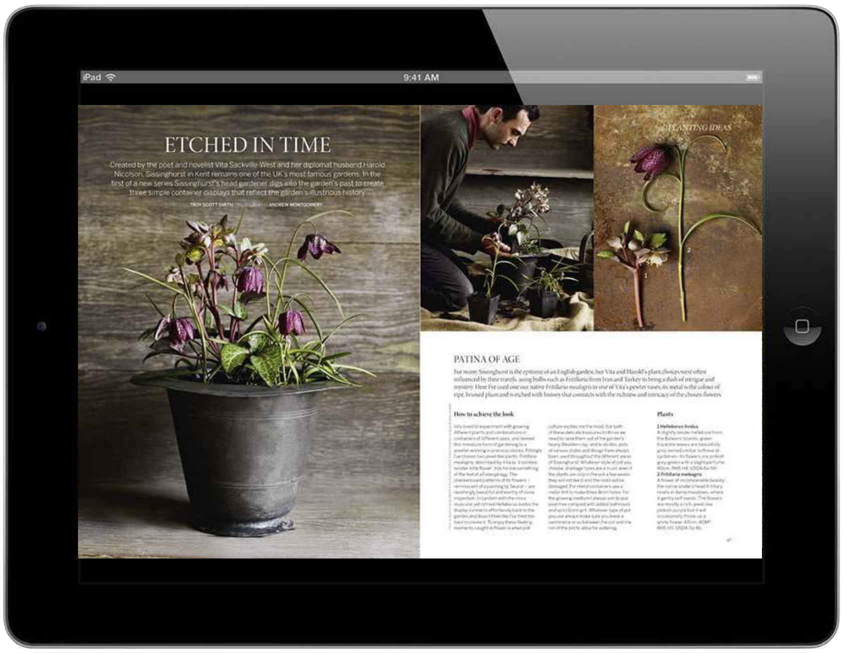
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ETCHED IN TIME
PLANTING IDEAS
PATINA OF AGE

Created by the poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West and her diplomat husband Harold Nicolson, Sissinghurst in Kent remains one of the UK's most famous gardens. In the first of a new series Sissinghurst's head gardener digs into the garden's past to create three simple container displays that reflect the garden's illustrious history

TROY SCOTT SMITH ANDREW MONTGOMERY

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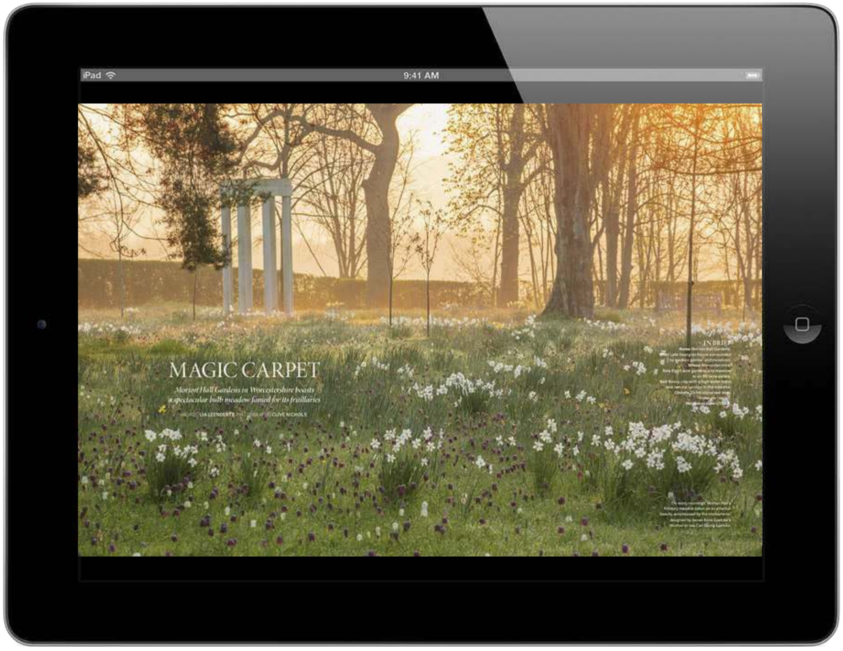
WOOD ANEMONES
PLANT PROFILE

There is charm in the simple form of an anemone, and the diversity of plants in the wild has provided rich pickings for enthusiasts

WORDS JOHN HOYLAND PHOTOGRAPHS LYNN KEDDIE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MAGIC CARPET
IN BRIEF

Morton Hall Gardens in Worcestershire boasts a spectacular bulb meadow famed for its fritillaries

LIA LEENDERTZ CLIVE NICHOLS

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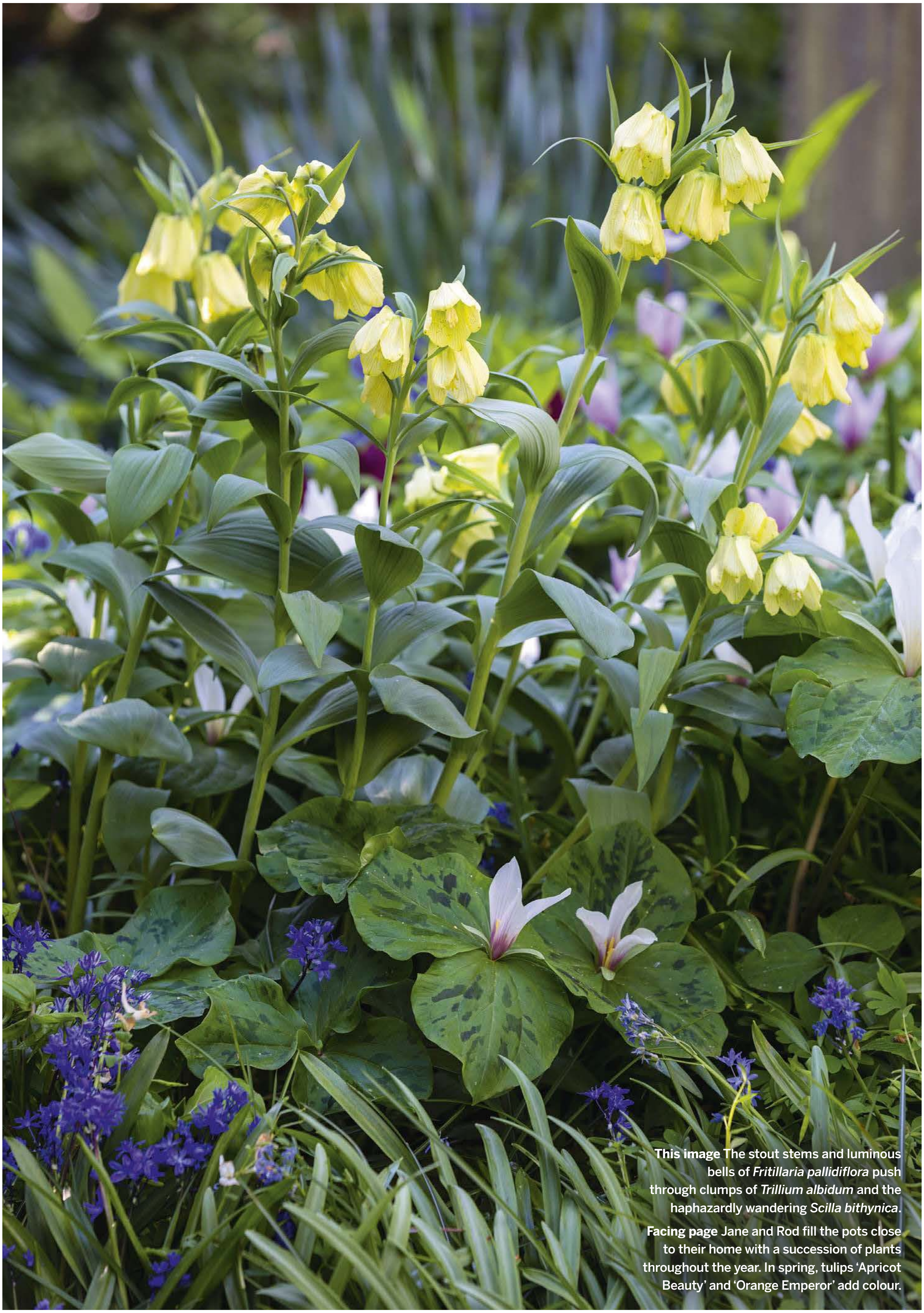
JOYS OF SPRING

Experts in early bulbs and alpine plants, Rod and Jane Leeds have created a garden that is brimming with life and colour in spring

WORDS **JOHN HOYLAND** PHOTOGRAPHS **RICHARD BLOOM**

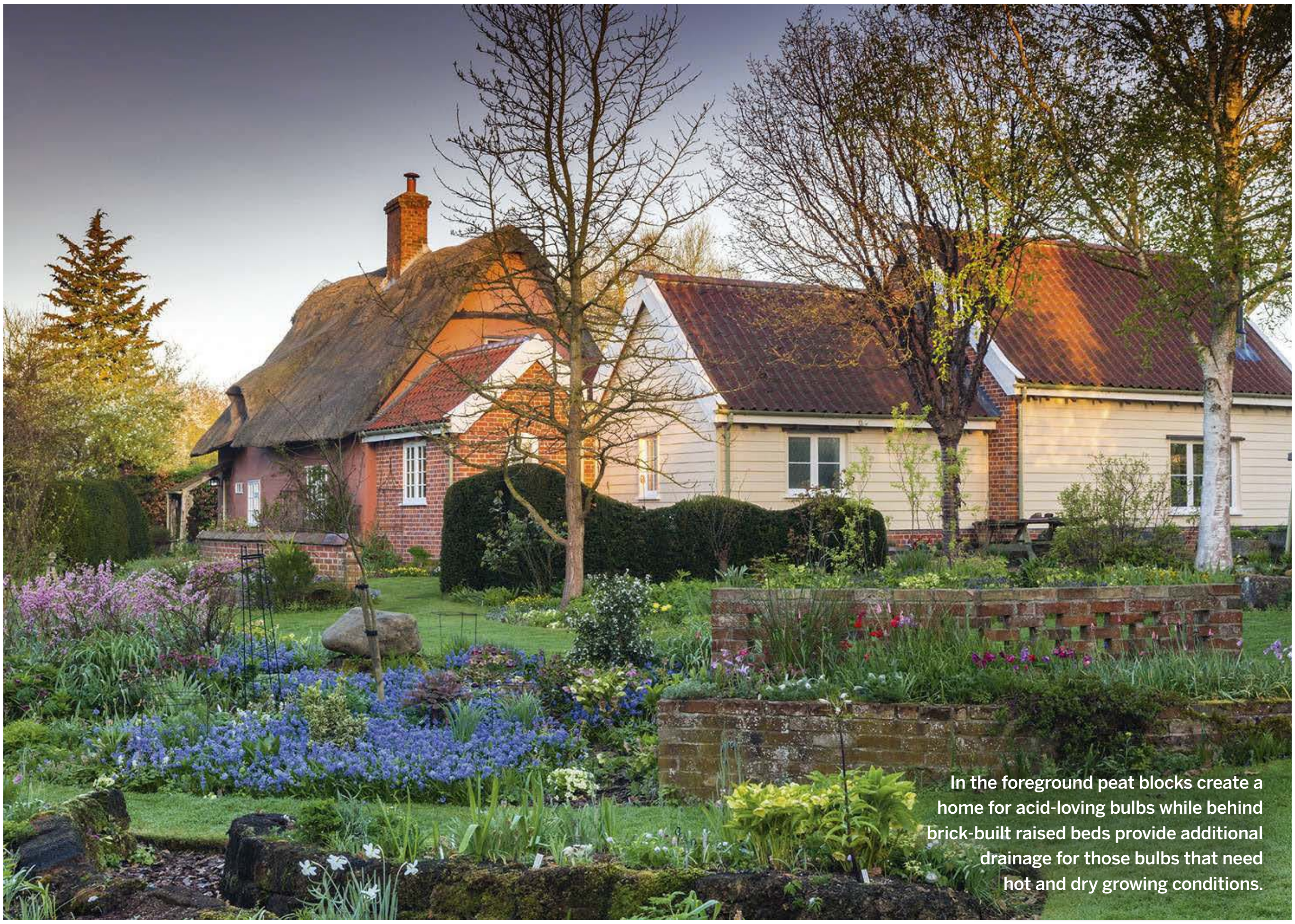
IN BRIEF

Name Chestnuts.
What The garden of two plant collectors, packed with large collections of bulbs and alpine plants. Meadow areas with naturalised bulbs, greenhouses and cold frames for propagating and raising bulbs and alpines.
Where Suffolk.
Size Approximately one acre.
Soil Boulder clay overlaid with decades of compost.
Climate Mild and temperate. The garden is protected from winds by a shelter belt of trees. Average annual rainfall is 1,185mm.
Hardiness zone USDA 8.



This image The stout stems and luminous bells of *Fritillaria pallidiflora* push through clumps of *Trillium albidum* and the haphazardly wandering *Scilla bithynica*.

Facing page Jane and Rod fill the pots close to their home with a succession of plants throughout the year. In spring, tulips 'Apricot Beauty' and 'Orange Emperor' add colour.



In the foreground peat blocks create a home for acid-loving bulbs while behind brick-built raised beds provide additional drainage for those bulbs that need hot and dry growing conditions.

WE WENT ALONG TO AN OPEN GARDEN WHERE WE SAW A GREENHOUSE THAT WAS FULL OF BEAUTIFUL BULBS AND WE WERE ENTRANCED

Driving along a narrow lane in rural Suffolk, there is no mistaking Jane and Rod Leeds' garden. Tumbling through the fence and flowing down to the road is a cascade of colourful plants. In the spring the garden teems with trilliums, erythroniums and fritillaries; later the lilies take over before handing the relay to amaryllis and nerines.

Both Jane and Rod have been involved in the Alpine Garden Society for decades and Rod is the author of several books on growing bulbs. The couple are as full of life as their garden, and happy to share their extensive experience of bulb and alpine growing. No one leaves their garden without having a plant pressed into their hands – I came away with a very elegant autumn-flowering crocus – or benefiting from their down-to-earth, practical advice.

Your garden is jam-packed full of bulbs. Where did your enthusiasm for gardening with bulbs begin?

Jane Like most things in life it was serendipity. Forty-five years ago open gardens were a novelty and we went along to one out of curiosity. At the time we were living in a semi-detached house and were not really gardeners: like everyone else we grew a few daffodils and when they were finished we tied the leaves in knots. And then at this open garden we saw a greenhouse that housed Mediterranean-style plants and it was full of beautiful bulbs. We were entranced.

Rod That garden was owned by plant collector Richard Britten and his enthusiasm was infectious. At about the same time we moved here to what seemed like a massive garden but it was meeting Richard that inspired us. He became a great mentor.

Are you still developing the garden?

Rod Yes, we've just acquired a strip of land just over the road so we can expand a little and we're replanting some of the beds. After a few years a garden benefits from being rejuvenated. Plants get old and soil needs refreshing, so we're doing that in parts of the garden. And there are new plants to study. We've just done a lot of work on colchicums and are now starting to get interested in *Dierama*, the angel's fishing rod, because we have one plant of *D. pulcherrimum* and in the summer, seeing it arching over, I thought: "You are utterly beautiful, we should look at the rest of your family."

Jane We looked through a monograph on dieramas and thought "Wow, look at all these." And so it begins.

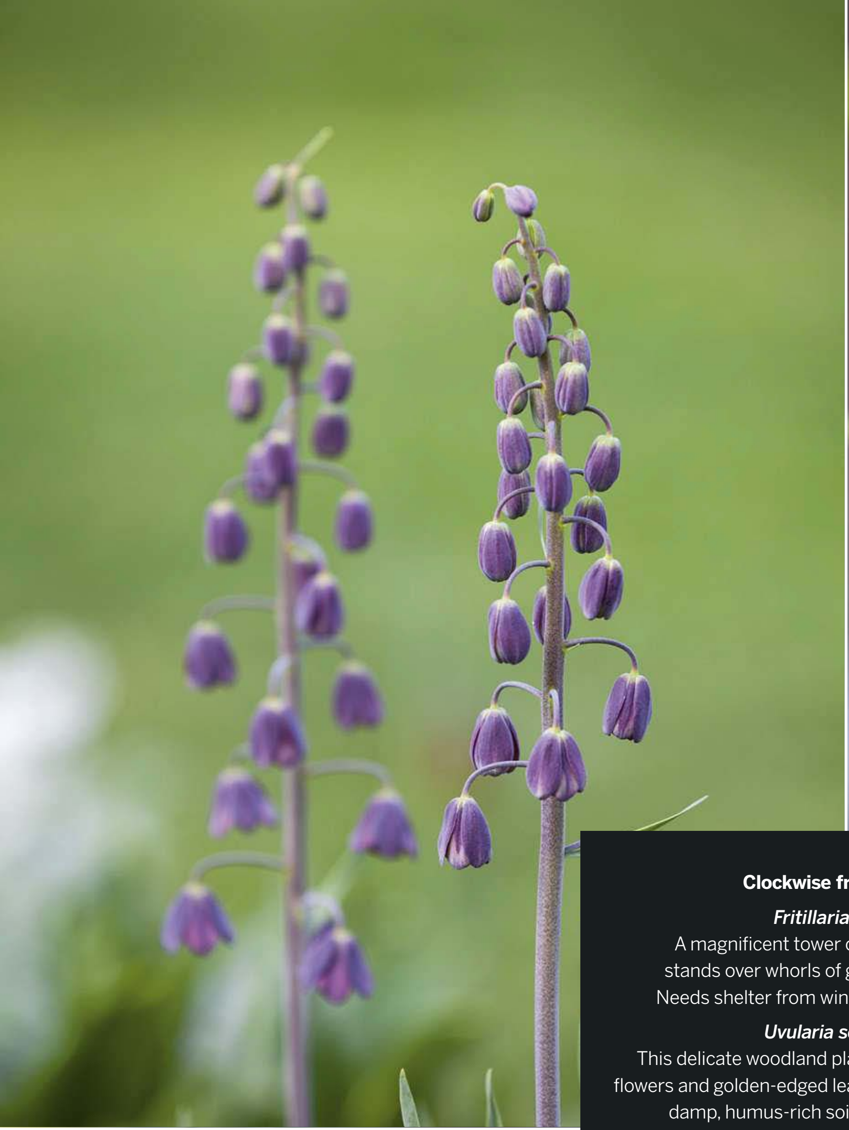
What advice would you give to other gardeners to encourage them to use more bulbs in the garden?

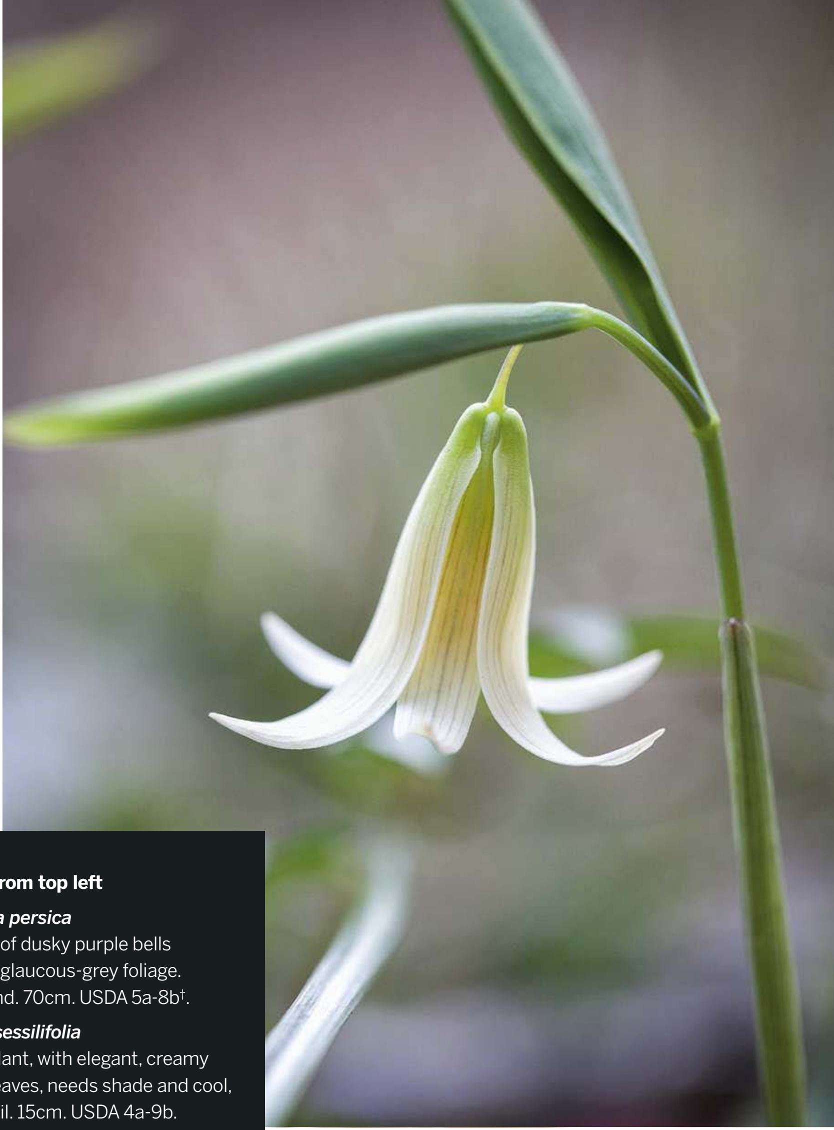
Rod I think that the greatest revelation to us has been discovering that there are microclimates in the garden and that every garden ▷

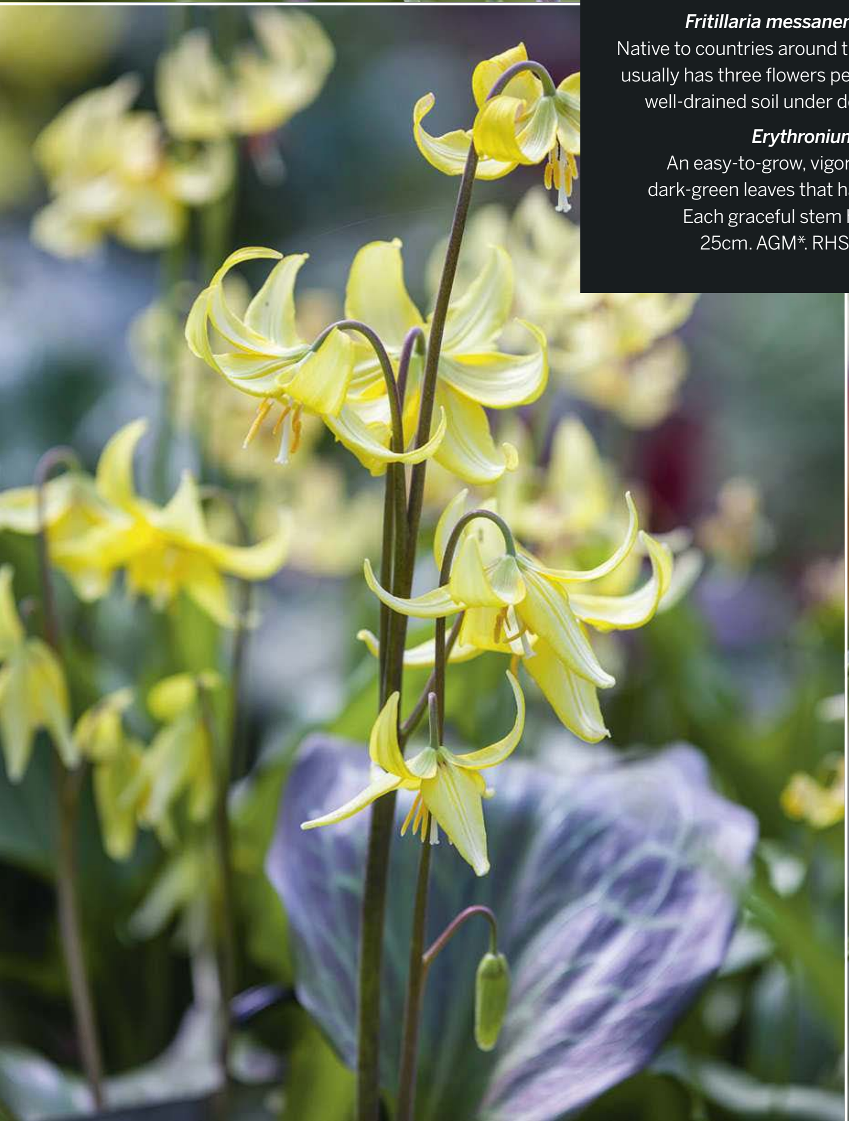
To continue turn to page 44

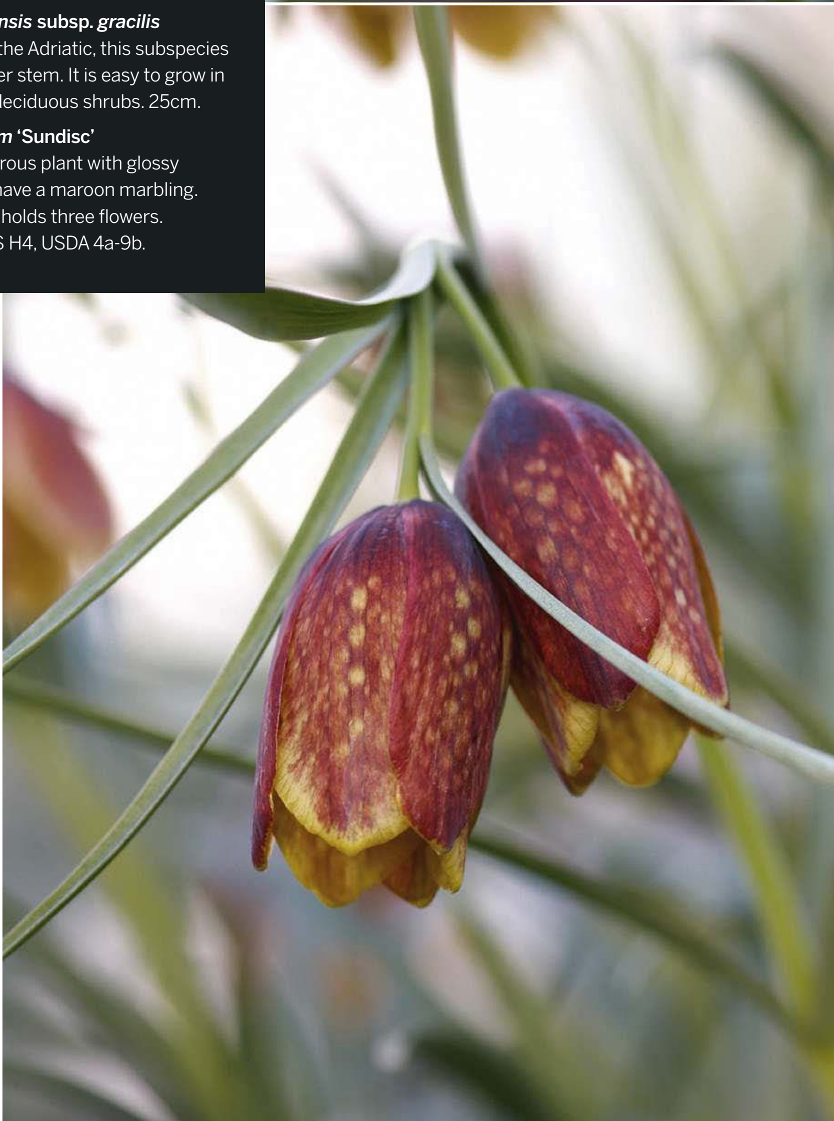
FRITILLARIA MESSANENSIS SUBSP. *GRACILIS* TORIE CHUGG / GAP PHOTOS

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.









Clockwise from top left

Fritillaria persica
A magnificent tower of dusky purple bells stands over whorls of glaucous-grey foliage. Needs shelter from wind. 70cm. USDA 5a-8b[†].

Uvularia sessilifolia
This delicate woodland plant, with elegant, creamy flowers and golden-edged leaves, needs shade and cool, damp, humus-rich soil. 15cm. USDA 4a-9b.

Fritillaria messanensis* subsp. *gracilis
Native to countries around the Adriatic, this subspecies usually has three flowers per stem. It is easy to grow in well-drained soil under deciduous shrubs. 25cm.

***Erythronium* 'Sundisc'**
An easy-to-grow, vigorous plant with glossy dark-green leaves that have a maroon marbling. Each graceful stem holds three flowers. 25cm. AGM[*]. RHS H4, USDA 4a-9b.

Narrow paths wind around densely planted beds. Among them a mature specimen of *Magnolia stellata*, with its sparkling white flowers, is underplanted with *Muscari armeniacum*.

GROWING BULBS

Rod and Jane (left) offer advice on how to get the best out of your spring bulbs

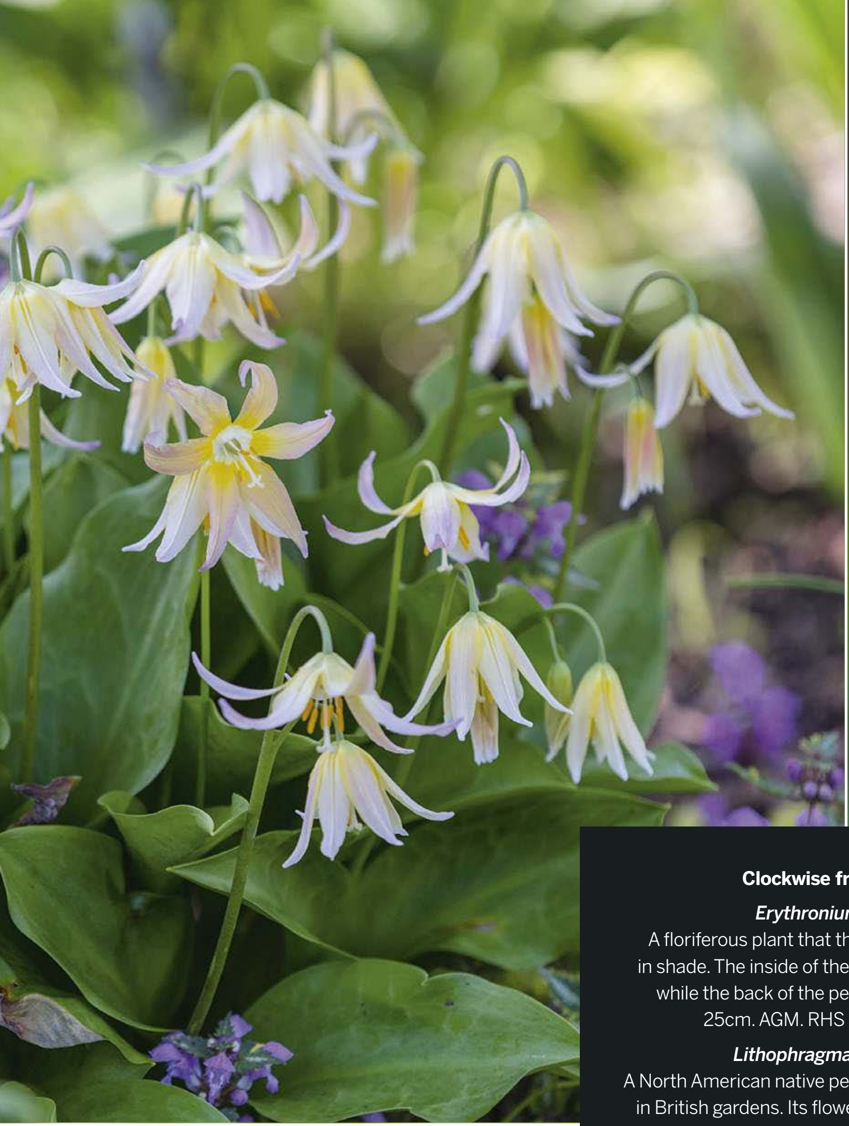
Try growing bulbs from seed. It is far easier than most gardeners imagine and can give you lots of bulbs in a relatively short period. Seed of cyclamen, crocus, *Tulipa sprengeri*, *Tulipa sylvestris*, lilies and most members of the *Fritillaria* can be scattered directly on to the soil and lightly covered. Once established they will re-seed.

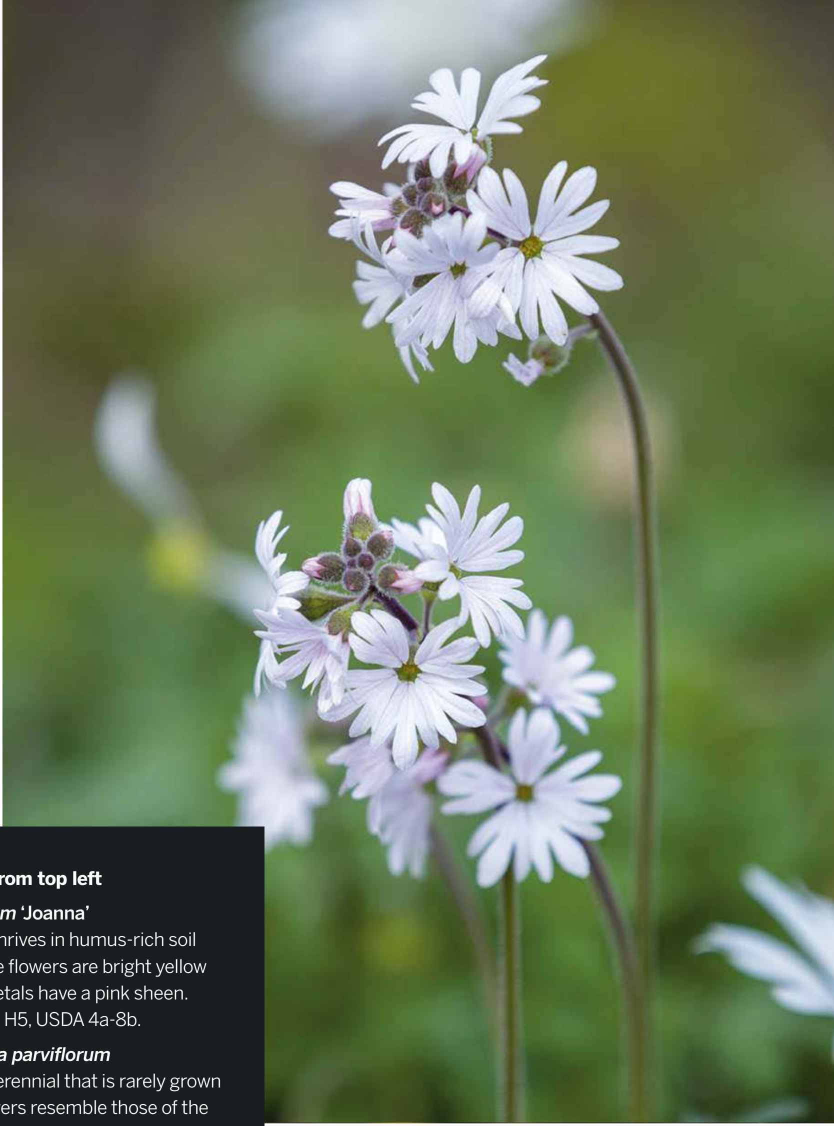
It is easy to forget where bulbs are planted, with the risk that you might put a fork through them when they are dormant. Put a layer of sharp sand over the area where bulbs are planted to indicate their location.

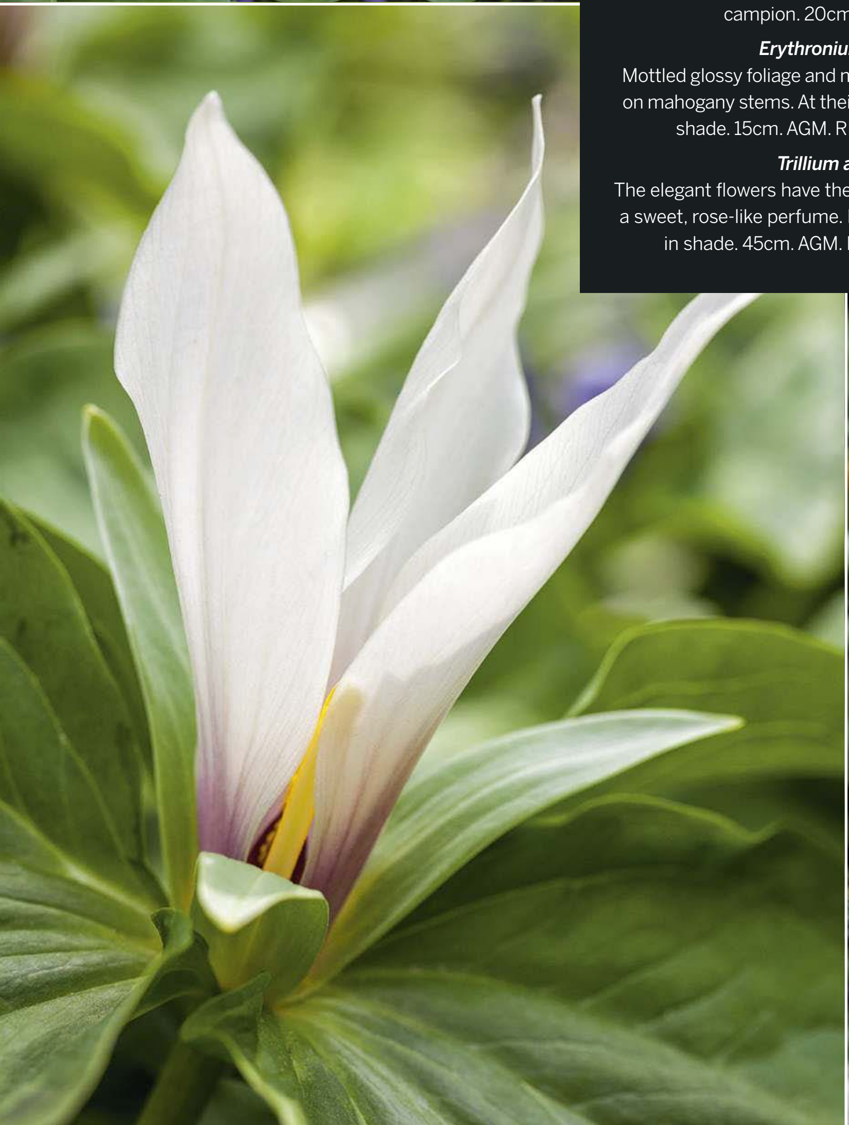
Plant lots. Bulbs planted in large groups or in drifts look much better than single specimens. Bulbs can be inexpensive and, in general, the cheaper the bulb the more likely it is to thrive.

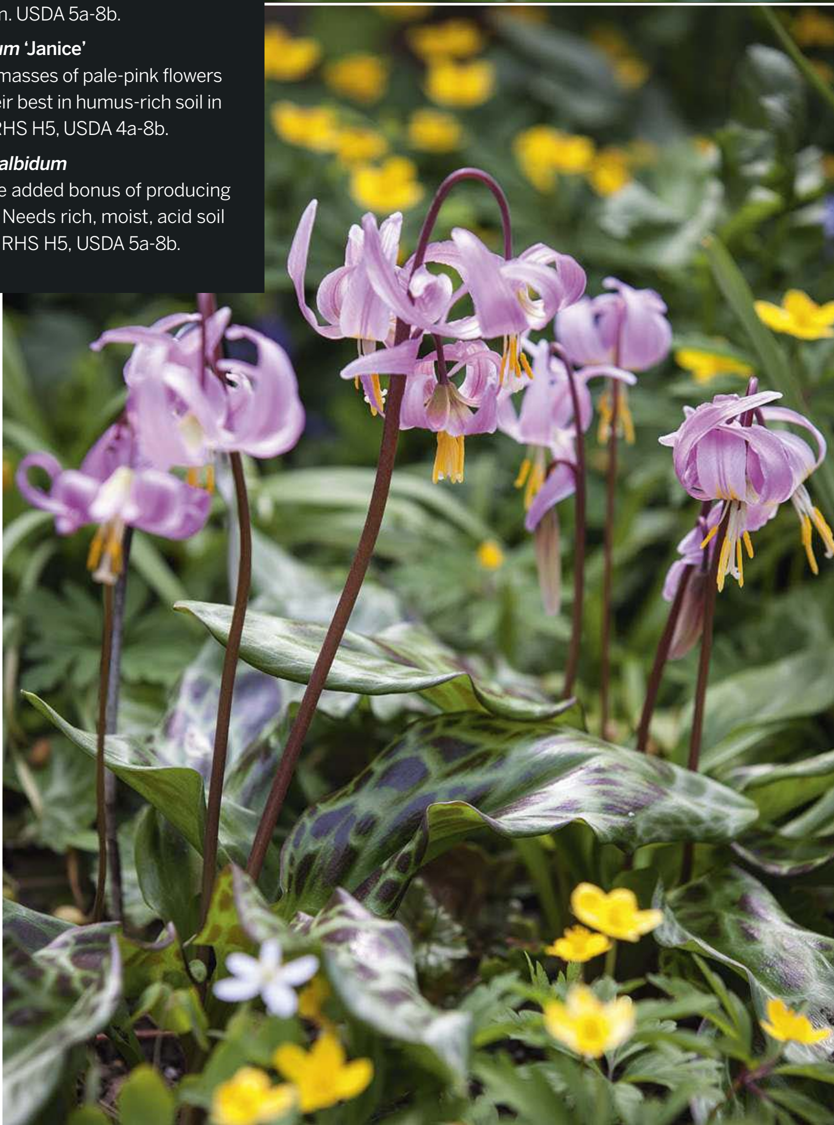
Ensure that you are planting the bulb the right way up, with the roots pointing down into the soil. Sometimes it is hard to tell, particularly with corms of crocus and some gladioli. With these, look for the scar that roots have left behind. On heavy soils, plant *Fritillaria imperialis* and *Fritillaria persica* bulbs at an angle, to prevent water collecting in their centres.

The best sources of help and information are local nurseries and horticultural societies. The membership fee to a specialist society, such as the Alpine Garden Society, repays itself quickly in the advice and inspiration. Not to mention the free seeds that you get.









Clockwise from top left

***Erythronium* 'Joanna'**
A floriferous plant that thrives in humus-rich soil in shade. The inside of the flowers are bright yellow while the back of the petals have a pink sheen. 25cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

Lithophragma parviflorum
A North American native perennial that is rarely grown in British gardens. Its flowers resemble those of the campion. 20cm. USDA 5a-8b.

***Erythronium* 'Janice'**
Mottled glossy foliage and masses of pale-pink flowers on mahogany stems. At their best in humus-rich soil in shade. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

Trillium albidum
The elegant flowers have the added bonus of producing a sweet, rose-like perfume. Needs rich, moist, acid soil in shade. 45cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.

The white-flowering *Magnolia salicifolia* 'Wada's Memory' dominates the front of the house in spring. It's underplanted with *Helleborus* x *hybridus* among the foliage of later-flowering bulbs.

YOU LEARN A LOT BY LOOKING AT NATURE AND ALSO BY LOOKING AT WHAT GROWS WELL LOCALLY AND HOW IT IS GROWN

▷ has them. So if a plant is struggling in one part of the garden try it somewhere else.

Jane That some things won't like your garden is a difficult thing to learn about gardening. People sometimes look at our plants and say "Oh, I can't grow that." Maybe their conditions aren't right. Possibly no one could grow that plant in their soil in their position. You just have to find plants that do grow well for you.

Rod We have some fritillaries that we can't grow in most of the garden but in one small part they thrive and are setting seed. And for me, when a plant is setting seed it is happy.

Jane Over the years there must have been an equal number of plants that haven't grown well as have. The important thing is not to get disheartened.

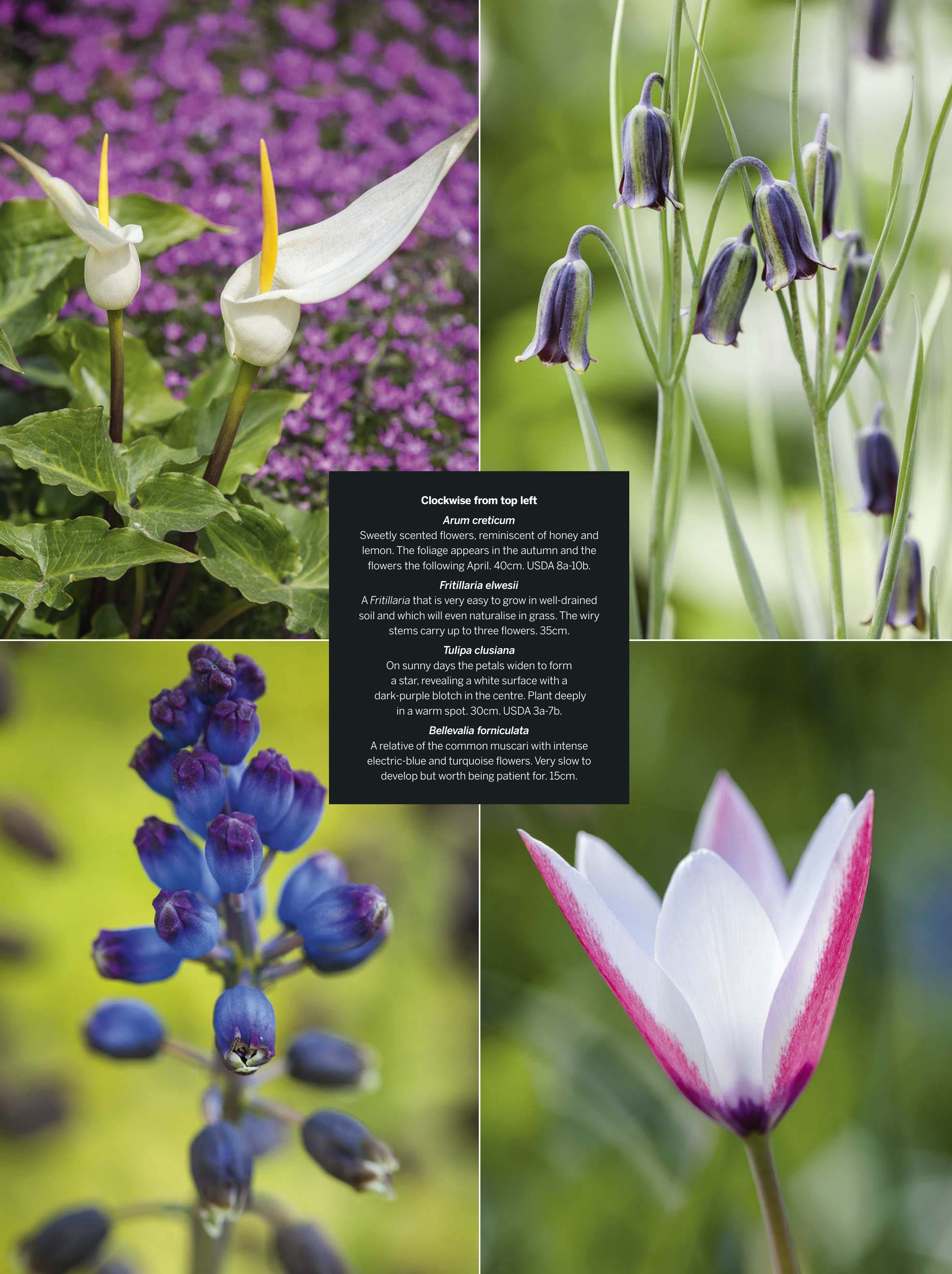
As well as housing lots of bulb collections the garden is very beautiful. How much work is involved?

Jane We do have all these collections, but the most important thing is that the garden looks good, whether in the depths of winter or high summer.

Rod Yes, we are 365-days-a-year gardeners and we enjoy frosty mornings as much as summer evenings. You learn a lot by looking at nature and also by looking at what grows well locally and how it is grown. In the early days we built a rock garden for some of our alpines and small bulbs and it looked awful. The stone didn't look right away from Gloucestershire, so we built raised beds with old bricks and railway sleepers. They look far better here in Suffolk than rock brought from miles and miles away. ◻

RECOMMENDED BULB SUPPLIERS

- **Avon Bulbs**
  Burnt House Farm, Mid Lambrook,
  South Petherton, Somerset TA13 5HE.
  Tel 01460 242177, avonbulbs.co.uk
- **Edrom Nurseries**
  Coldingham, Eyemouth,
  Berwickshire TD14 5TZ.
  Tel 01890 771386, edrom-nurseries.co.uk
- **Jacques Amand**
  The Nurseries, Clamp Hill,
  Stanmore, Middlesex HA7 3JS.
  Tel 020 8420 7110,
  jacquesamandintl.com
- **Pottertons Nursery**
  Cottage Nursery, Moortown Road, Market Rasen,
  Lincolnshire LN7 6HX.
  Tel 01472 851714, pottertons.co.uk



Clockwise from top left

Arum creticum

Sweetly scented flowers, reminiscent of honey and lemon. The foliage appears in the autumn and the flowers the following April. 40cm. USDA 8a-10b.

Fritillaria elwesii

A *Fritillaria* that is very easy to grow in well-drained soil and which will even naturalise in grass. The wiry stems carry up to three flowers. 35cm.

Tulipa clusiana

On sunny days the petals widen to form a star, revealing a white surface with a dark-purple blotch in the centre. Plant deeply in a warm spot. 30cm. USDA 3a-7b.

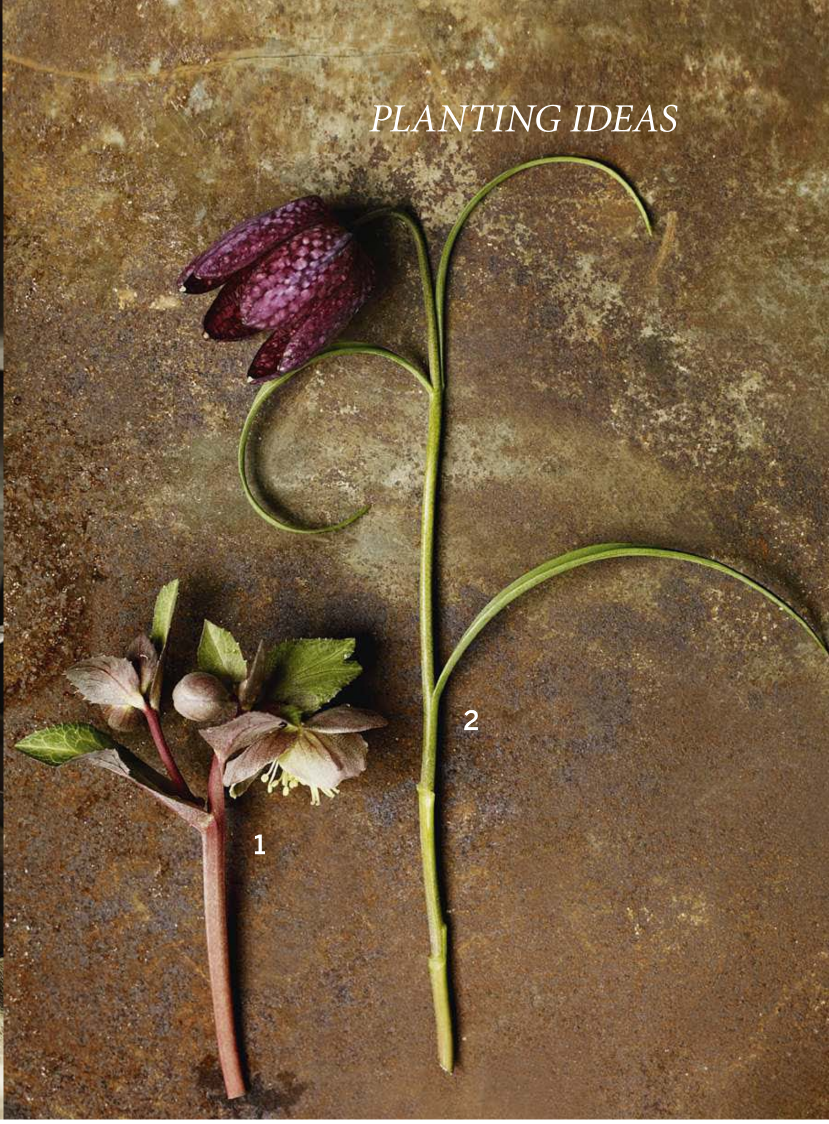
Bellevalia forniculata

A relative of the common muscari with intense electric-blue and turquoise flowers. Very slow to develop but worth being patient for. 15cm.

ETCHED IN TIME

Created by Vita Sackville-West and her diplomat husband Harold Nicolson, Sissinghurst in Kent remains one of the UK's most famous gardens. In the first of a new series Sissinghurst's head gardener digs into the garden's past to create three simple container displays that reflect the garden's illustrious history

WORDS **TROY SCOTT SMITH** PHOTOGRAPHS **ANDREW MONTGOMERY**



PATINA OF AGE

For many, Sissinghurst is the epitome of an English garden, but Vita and Harold's plant choices were often influenced by their travels, using bulbs such as *Fritillaria* from Iran and Turkey to bring a dash of intrigue and mystery. Here I've used one our native *Fritillaria mealagris* in one of Vita's pewter vases; its metal is the colour of ripe, bruised plum and is etched with history that connects with the richness and intricacy of the two flowers.

How to achieve the look

Vita loved to experiment with growing different plants and combinations in containers of different sizes, and likened this miniature form of gardening to a jeweller working in precious stones. Fittingly I've chosen two jewel-like plants. *Fritillaria mealagris,* described by Vita as 'a sombre, sinister little flower', has for me something of the feel of a Fabergé egg. The checkerboard patterns of its flowers – reminiscent of a painting by Seurat – are ravishingly beautiful and worthy of close inspection. In tandem with the more muscular yet refined *Helleborus lividus* the display connects effortlessly back to the garden and doesn't feel like I've tried too hard to create it. To enjoy these fleeting moments caught in flower is when pot culture excites me the most. For both of these delicate treasures to thrive we need to raise them out of the garden's heavy Wealden clay, and to do this, pots of various styles and design have always been used throughout the different areas of Sissinghurst. Whatever style of pot you choose, drainage holes are a must, even if the plants are only in the pot a few weeks they will not like it and the roots will be damaged. For metal containers use a metal drill to make three 8mm holes. For the growing medium I always aim to use peat-free compost with added leafmould and up to 6mm grit. Whatever type of pot you use always make sure you leave a centimetre or so between the soil and the rim of the pot to allow for watering.

Plants

1 *Helleborus lividus*
A slightly tender hellebore from the Balearic Islands. The green tripartite leaves are beautifully grey-veined similar to those of cyclamen. Its flowers are pinkish grey-green with a slight perfume. 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 8a-9b†.

2 *Fritillaria meleagris*
A flower of incomparable beauty, the native snake's head fritillary revels in damp meadows, where it gently self-seeds. The flowers are mostly a rich, jewel-like pinkish purple but it will occasionally throw up a white flower. 40cm. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

RAISED EXPECTATIONS

Using pots offers you the great convenience of setting down a smear of colour just where you need it. But when you're using narcissi you can easily end up with an arrangement that has an unnatural look or with one that is too yellow biased. I have learned to avoid strident yellow forms and big leafy types but also to avoid mixtures – instead narcissi work best if you plant separate pots of just a few carefully selected kinds or, if the pot is impressive enough, a single star.

How to achieve the look

I love the idea of the garden seamlessly segueing into the landscape beyond. In a similar way, with this large trough, I have tried to borrow the language of the Orchard at Sissinghurst, where great sheets of flowering daffodils, mostly composed of the early *Narcissus lobularis* followed by the elegant *Narcissus poeticus* var. *recurvus* and later buttercups and cow parsley, form an undercurrent to the garden through March and April. I have tried to replicate the Orchard's exuberance, but scaled down in pots nearer to the house. The jonquils perform this role perfectly – multi-headed, fine foliaged and heavily scented. The scented *Narcissus* 'Thalia', the long-flowering *N.* 'WP Milner' and the late-flowering *N.* 'Hawera' with primrose-coloured flowers are all good for pot culture, but for this imposing lead trough I've chosen the delicate and scented *N.* 'Elka'. My general philosophy is to be generous when deciding how many bulbs to use, for example in a pot of 80cm diameter I would use 75 bulbs of a mid-sized narcissus. Vita was also never meagre or stingy in her planting, saying, 'I like generosity in flowers as much as I do in people, cram, cram, cram every nook and cranny.' Narcissi bulbs need to be in the ground by September and if grown in pots need plenty of grit, roughly one part grit to three parts John Innes No 1. With troughs you should also ensure that the drainage hole is clear and kept open by using crocks over it.

Plant

1 *Narcissus* 'Elka'
Narcissi are flowers of such grace, poise, beauty and delight. This is one of the brightest stars in a large firmament of *Narcissus* types; she flaunts delicate, perfect, ivory-white petals with a pale-yellow trumpet that fades to china white in a delightful way. Pot displays are also a great opportunity to add fragrance and in this respect *Narcissus* 'Elka' doesn't disappoint with a scent that is light and sweet. 25cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-10b.

FRESH ASSOCIATIONS

The mantra right plant, right place has many merits, but one simple dodge that it took me a while to fully embrace was to grow plants in pots that I otherwise wasn't able to in the open ground, either because of soil, climate or geography. At Sissinghurst I struggle to grow the yellow *Erythronium* 'Pagoda', but by placing it in a pot I can provide just the right conditions that will encourage not only a healthy plant but one with good flowering and persistence.

How to achieve the look

I like to have lots of things that can be brought into the house, and so as well as using the large static pots and troughs at Sissinghurst I am slowly increasing the number of small portable pots that I can put down here or there and even bring indoors to enjoy at close quarters. At Sissinghurst I am spoiled by the choice of containers available that have such intimate associations with the garden's history. With this container I'm bringing some of my own history to the table. It's an old metal tin is that I usually use for storing packets of seeds, but its faded colour is the perfect foil for the yellow flowers of *Erythronium* 'Pagoda'. Despite the architectural permanence of the flowers, I love the dissolved feel the plant gives off around the edges; a misty, soft, diaphanous feel. The individual flowers are held on wiry stems about 30cm high and are shaped exactly like a pagoda's roof; sloping down from an apex and upturned at the corners. The leaves are a verdant deep green and sparingly, but exquisitely marked in chocolate-brown, the same colour as the stems. The leaves too have that delightful quality of capturing pearls of water when it rains, adding to the overall beauty. In most of our pots we use a peat-free compost with added grit, with the addition of a slow-release fertiliser and vine weevil control. Large pots need watering once a week, but smaller pots, such as this, can often need watering three times a week, particularly in summer.

Plant

1 *Erythronium* 'Pagoda'
A bright but pleasing yellow, the flowers of *Erythronium* 'Pagoda' are elegant and numerous, with several held on one stem. Buy the bulbs in autumn and plant pointed end uppermost at 10cm deep in humus-rich, well-drained soil in partial shade. Alternatively, the whole plant can be lifted and divided after flowering.
30cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA3a-9b.

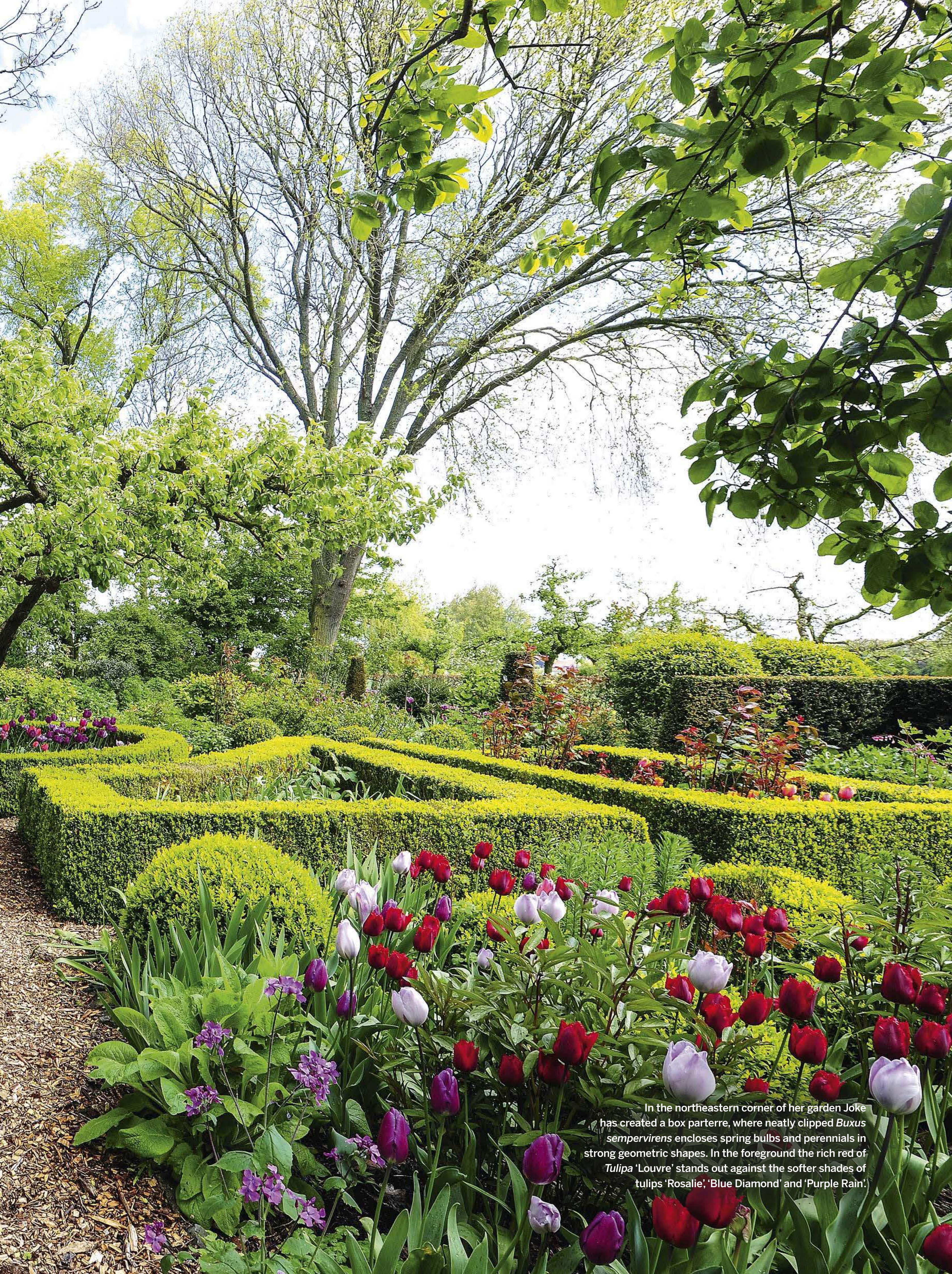
ALL ABOUT COLOUR

A thousand tulips shine among the emergent foliage of spring in the garden of bulb enthusiast Joke Cijsouw

WORDS **SIMONE VAN HEININGEN** PHOTOGRAPHS **SIETSKE DE VRIES**

IN BRIEF

What Cottage garden with an abundance of spring bulbs especially tulips.
Where Biggekerke, the Netherlands.
Size 20,000 square metres of which approximately 5,000 square metres is ornamental garden.
Soil Clay, but not particularly heavy.
Climate Moderate maritime.
Hardiness zone USDA 10a.



In the northeastern corner of her garden Joke has created a box parterre, where neatly clipped *Buxus sempervirens* encloses spring bulbs and perennials in strong geometric shapes. In the foreground the rich red of *Tulipa* 'Louvre' stands out against the softer shades of tulips 'Rosalie', 'Blue Diamond' and 'Purple Rain'.

I'm always late ordering in my tulips," says Joke Cijsouw. "So late in fact, that they are sometimes sold out by the time I start buying them on the internet. That often means a last-minute dash to the local garden centre to get some more." Given that Joke has been adding some 1,000 bulbs to her garden every autumn for the past 30 years, you have to wonder can she really forget? "No, it is just that I find it difficult deciding what the garden should look like in April, when it is not even November."

Set back from a country lane in the Dutch province of Zeeland, the cottage where Joke lives with her husband Henk, is at the end of a plane tree-lined drive that also takes you past lines of Turkey oaks, poplars and a paddock containing an old chestnut to a neat front lawn. Separating the lawn from a terrace by the house are two mixed borders speckled throughout with tulips: 'Black Parrot', 'Glasnost', 'Orange Favourite' and 'Apricot Beauty'.

"I use the planting method advocated by Dutch bulb expert Jacqueline van der Kloet," explains Joke. "Mix your bulbs up in a bucket, throw them around and plant where they land, usually some 20 bulbs per square metre." Perennials, such as *Euphorbia characias* and *Heuchera villosa* 'Palace Purple', and the snowy white of *Amelanchier lamarckii* provide interesting contrast. "I opt for tulips that flower in April, May," says Joke. "By that time, you will have fresh foliage as a backdrop, but at a height that still allows the tulips to shine."

Near the side entrance to the cottage, a cobbled yard is decorated with accessories from Joke's vintage shop, Interieur 't Hofje, which is based in the cottage's old barn. A pergola, which in summer is awash with *Rosa* Westerland (= 'Korwest') and *Rubus phoenicolasius*, screens the yard from the rest of the garden, with a traditional brick path linking the two areas. Although the cottage looks old, it was built just 40 years ago by the previous owners, using materials from the dilapidated farmhouse that first occupied this site. "They also laid the paths and built the fences," says Joke. "But their garden was all trees, elderberries and hazels. Some we kept, some succumbed to old age, and some we felled to make room for a more floriferous garden."

To achieve that vision, Joke and Henk first had to tackle the northwesterly winds that blow in from the North Sea. They started by planting a privet hedge along the northern boundary of the east-west oriented plot. Joke then had some of the local clay removed, replacing it with better draining forest soil bought from nearby Domburg. Over the years the couple have added more hedges for practical and aesthetic purposes. When they moved in, a hornbeam hedge parallel to the house separated the garden from a pony paddock. Once the ponies had gone, this too became part of the ornamental garden, and the eastern boundary was pushed back towards a low *Lonicera* hedge that keeps a couple of Zwartbles sheep in check. A wrought-iron gate in this hedge, opens out views across the sheep meadow to the countryside beyond – the perfect sightline from the conservatory and brick-paved terrace.

"I USE THE PLANTING METHOD, ADVOCATED BY DUTCH EXPERT JACQUELINE VAN DER KLOE – MIX YOUR BULBS UP IN A BUCKET, THROW THEM AROUND AND PLANT WHERE THEY LAND, USUALLY 20 BULBS PER SQUARE METRE"

To the left of the terrace, tulips grow among *Ajuga* and *Helleborus niger* in a box parterre, to the right is a vegetable garden and bergenia-edged border, where the pink, red and magenta of tulips 'Rosalie', 'Red Hat' and 'Doll's Minuet' are followed by similarly coloured *Lupinus* 'My Castle', cosmos and dahlias. "Come November, I'll try to decide on seven tulip cultivars," says Joke. "One strong colour, supported by a few softer pastels. I like whites and yellows, but I love reds, purples and pinks. And I get the occasional survivor from previous years. *Tulipa* 'Purissima' always comes back."

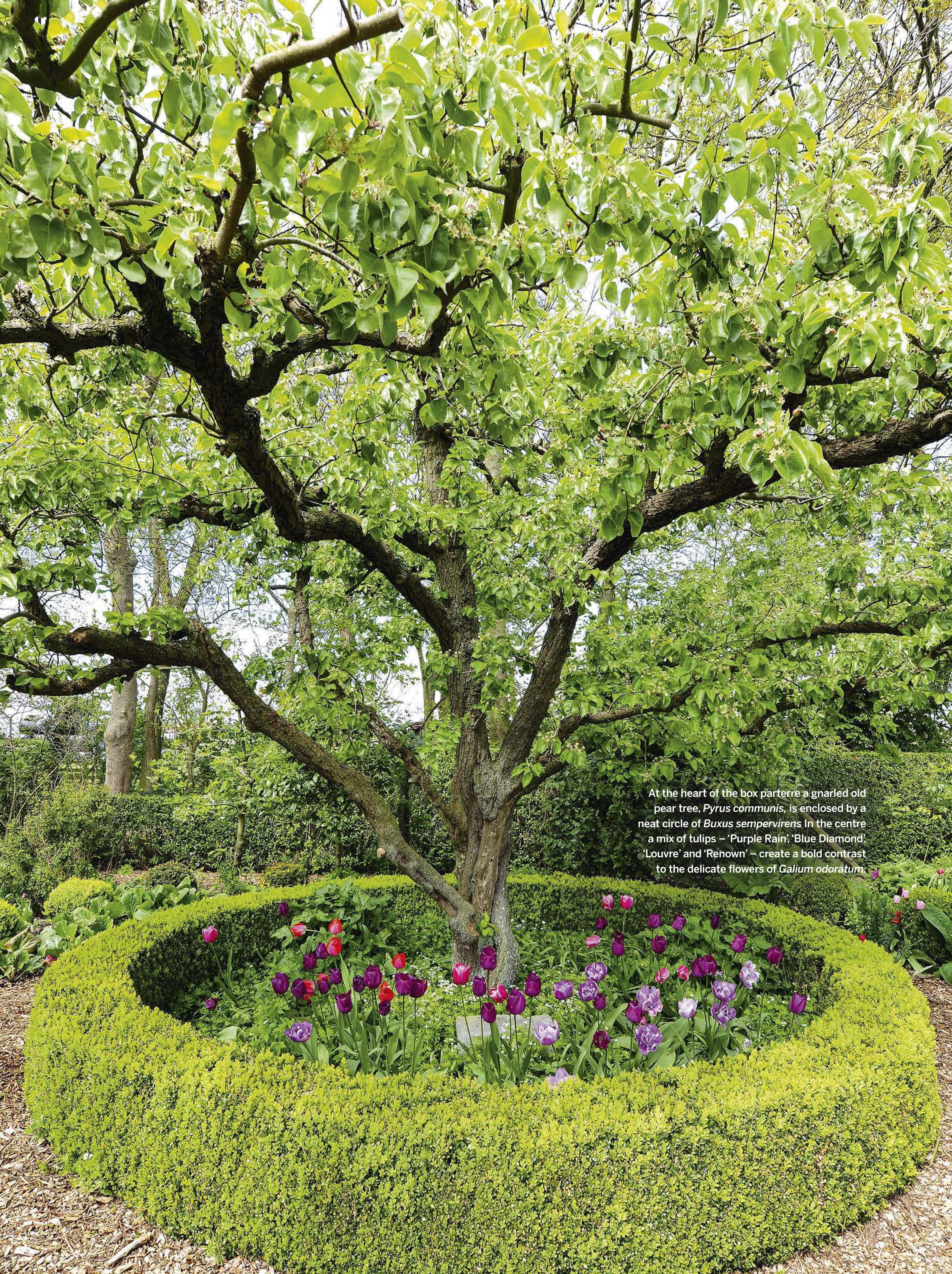
In a circle of box around a gnarly old *Pyrus communis*, tulips, including 'Purple Rain', 'Blue Diamond', 'Louvre' and 'Renown', rise up between *Scilla* and *Galium odoratum*. "Once they finish flowering, I take my hedge trimmer to the box and simply swoosh it across the soil as well," says Joke. "There's no use planting anything here for summer, because the tree's leaves will keep out all the light."

Elsewhere in the garden planting becomes more relaxed. A meandering path along the northern boundary, back to the front lawn, has a distinctly forest feel, with *Lunaria annua*, daffodils, primulas, and white and yellow tulips, such as 'Purissima', 'Maja' and 'Creme Upstar'. It is the perfect hideaway for the pheasants, mice and voles that feast on Joke's bulbs. Joke, however, shrugs off any worries she might have about the havoc such wildlife could wreak on her tulip displays – having put in 30,000 bulbs over the years, she can afford to lose a couple. □

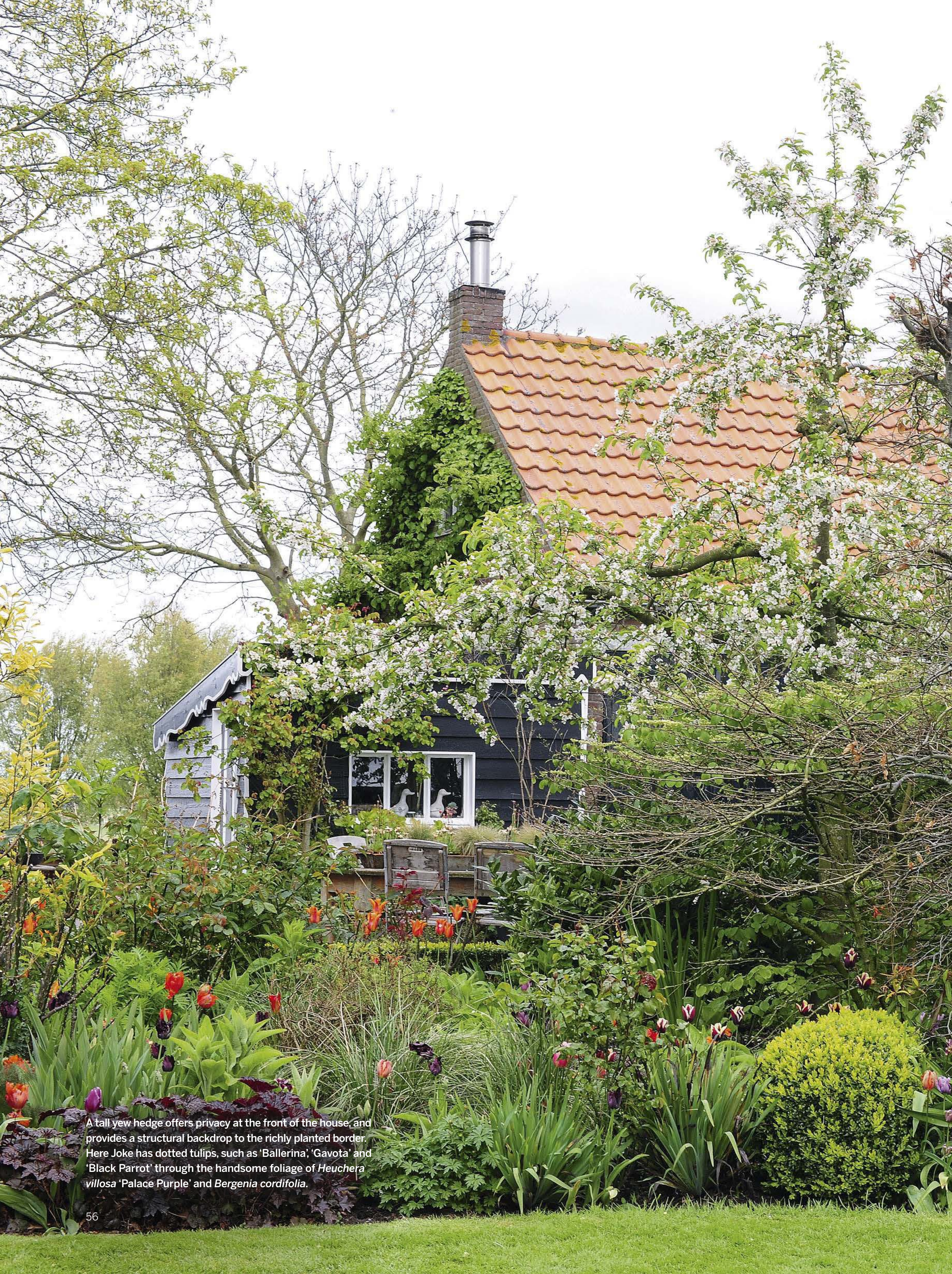
USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Noordweg 4, Biggekerke, the Netherlands. **Tel** +31 (0)118 552114. **Website** tuinthofje.nl
Open Every Thursday, 10am-4pm, or at other times by appointment.

Turn to page 60 for ten of Joke's favourite tulips.



At the heart of the box parterre a gnarled old pear tree, *Pyrus communis*, is enclosed by a neat circle of *Buxus sempervirens* In the centre a mix of tulips – 'Purple Rain', 'Blue Diamond', 'Louvre' and 'Renown' – create a bold contrast to the delicate flowers of *Galium odoratum*.

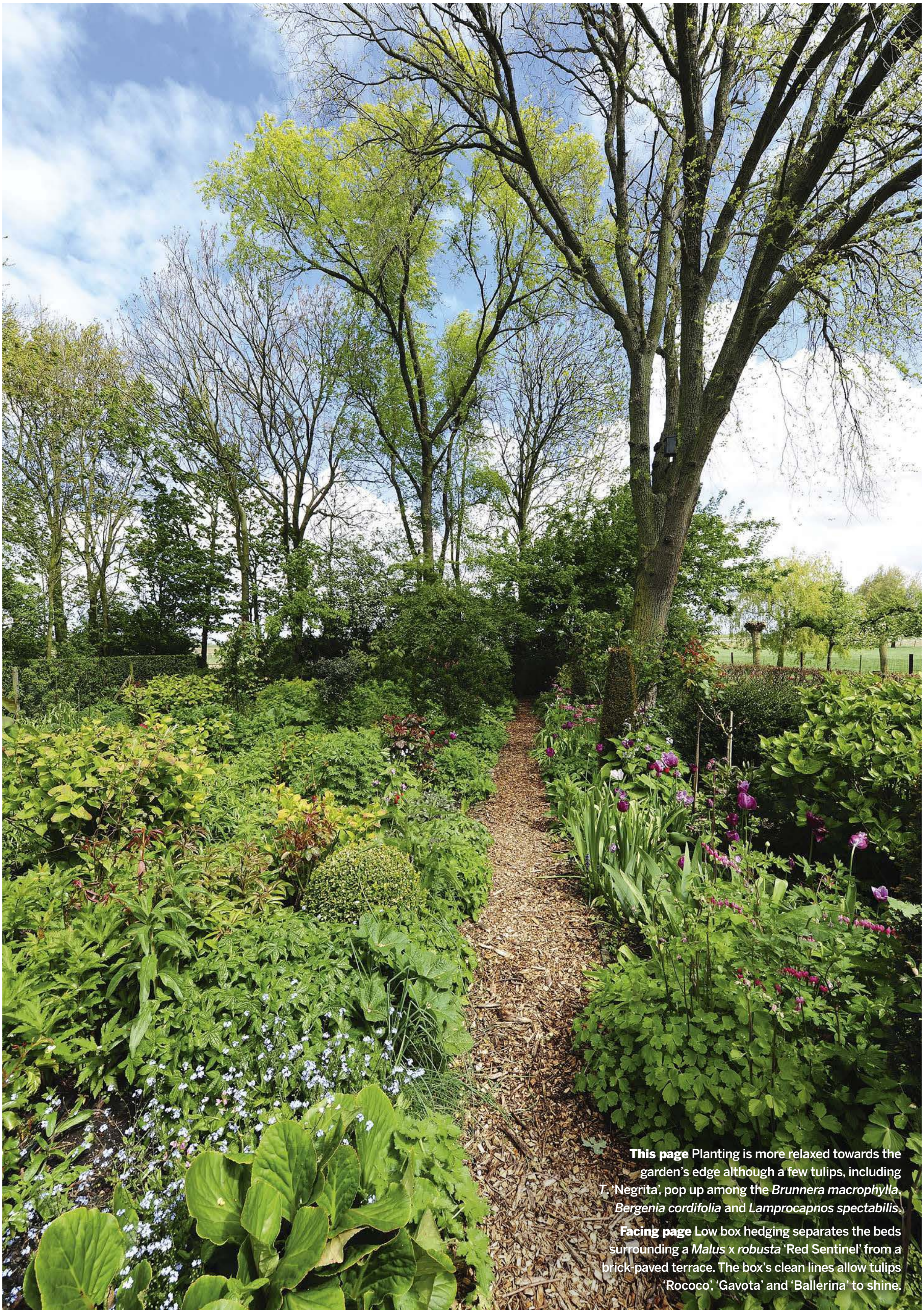


A tall yew hedge offers privacy at the front of the house, and provides a structural backdrop to the richly planted border. Here Joke has dotted tulips, such as 'Ballerina', 'Gavota' and 'Black Parrot' through the handsome foliage of *Heuchera villosa* 'Palace Purple' and *Bergenia cordifolia*.

HEDGING

Joke’s garden is just two miles from the coast at the far end of the Walcheren peninsula that juts out into the North Sea. One of a series of low-lying, former islands that make up the Dutch province of Zeeland, Walcheren is famously flat and the winds that rip across the peninsula would have made creating a garden impossible had Joke and Henk not prepared their garden by first planting out a series of hedges. On the northern and western boundaries of the plot practicality trumps aesthetics, with a dense privet hedge and a windbreak of Turkey oaks and poplars. Across the back garden, a hornbeam hedge is clipped to 1.2m, but every three metres, one plant has been allowed to grow up into a tall pillar. These pillars are mirrored in the pillars of yew that stand in the geometric box parterre in the garden’s northeastern corner. *Buxus sempervirens* is repeated throughout the garden, enclosing borders that line paths and seating areas and in numerous box balls dotted throughout the garden. These, together with evergreens such as *Bergenia cordifolia*, guarantee strong structure even in winter. To the front of the house, two yew hedges ensure privacy for a seating area and are the backdrop for two long, undulating borders. Using so many hedges and trees, does bring its own problems as they soak up a lot of the groundwater. To counter this Joke and Henk collect rainwater from their roof, which is then pumped throughout the garden via a soaker hose.

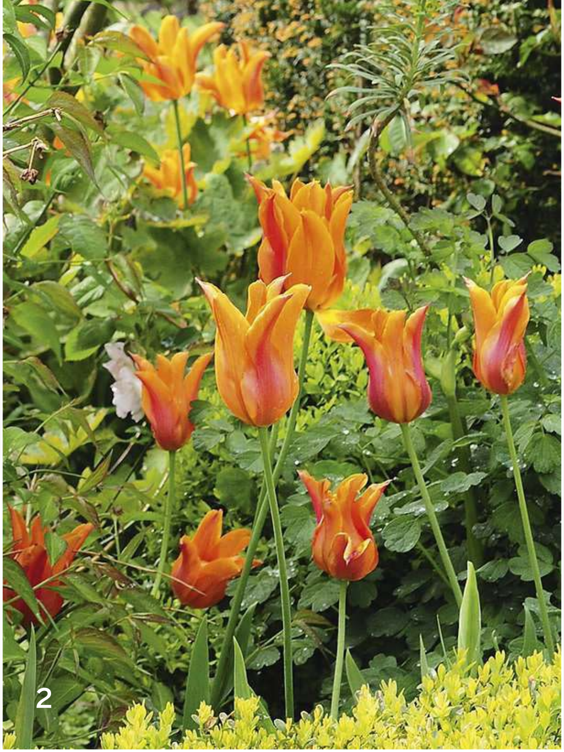
"ONCE THE TULIPS FINISH FLOWERING, I TAKE MY HEDGE TRIMMER TO THE BOX AND SIMPLY SWOOSH IT ACROSS THE SOIL"



This page Planting is more relaxed towards the garden's edge although a few tulips, including *T.* 'Negrita', pop up among the *Brunnera macrophylla*, *Bergenia cordifolia* and *Lamprocapnos spectabilis*.

Facing page Low box hedging separates the beds surrounding a *Malus* x *robusta* 'Red Sentinel' from a brick-paved terrace. The box's clean lines allow tulips 'Rococo', 'Gavota' and 'Ballerina' to shine.

1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10 RECOMMENDED TULIPS

1 ***Tulipa* 'Blue Diamond'** Beautifully shaped, purple-blue flowers from early April until most other tulips are past their prime. 45cm. USDA 3a-8b†.

2 ***T.* 'Ballerina'** This elegant, slender and tall tulip has a lovely scent. Its petals will open wide into a lily-like star shape. 60cm. AGM*. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

3 ***T.* 'Doll's Minuet'** Its narrow, pointed petals give this tulip a feathery and playful quality. It can grow up to 65cm tall, with long-lasting appeal as it flowers from mid-April to end of May. 65cm. USDA 3a-9a.

4 ***T.* 'Purple Rain'** Though fairly easy to grow, and able to withstand wind and rain, this rich-purple tulip prefers full sun. Packs the perfect punch among whites and soft pinks. 40cm. USDA 3a-8b.

5 ***T.* 'Louvre'** A statuesque tulip that flowers in May, so fairly late, and has a silvery fringe. 50cm. AGM. USDA 3a-8b.

6 ***T.* 'Glasnost'** Bold, ruffled, yellow-edged, bright-red flowers. These are seriously big blooms. 40cm. USDA 3a-8b.

7 ***T.* 'Blue Heron'** Plant this tulip where you can look into the flower, because as it opens up it reveals a contrasting dark centre. 65cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

8 ***T.* 'Ballade'** Highly recommended by Jacqueline van der Kloet. When planted in a sunny, fertile spot it will come back year after year. 50cm. AGM. USDA 3a-9b.

9 ***T.* 'Apricot Magic'** This early, single tulip is more peach than apricot. With its pointy, lance-shaped leaves and gothic-arched flower petals, it looks like the quintessential tulip. 40cm. USDA 3a-8b.

10 ***T.* 'Gavota'** Flowers in April with terracotta blooms feathered with gold. Its strong stem makes it the perfect cut flower. 50cm. AGM. USDA 3a-8b.

10

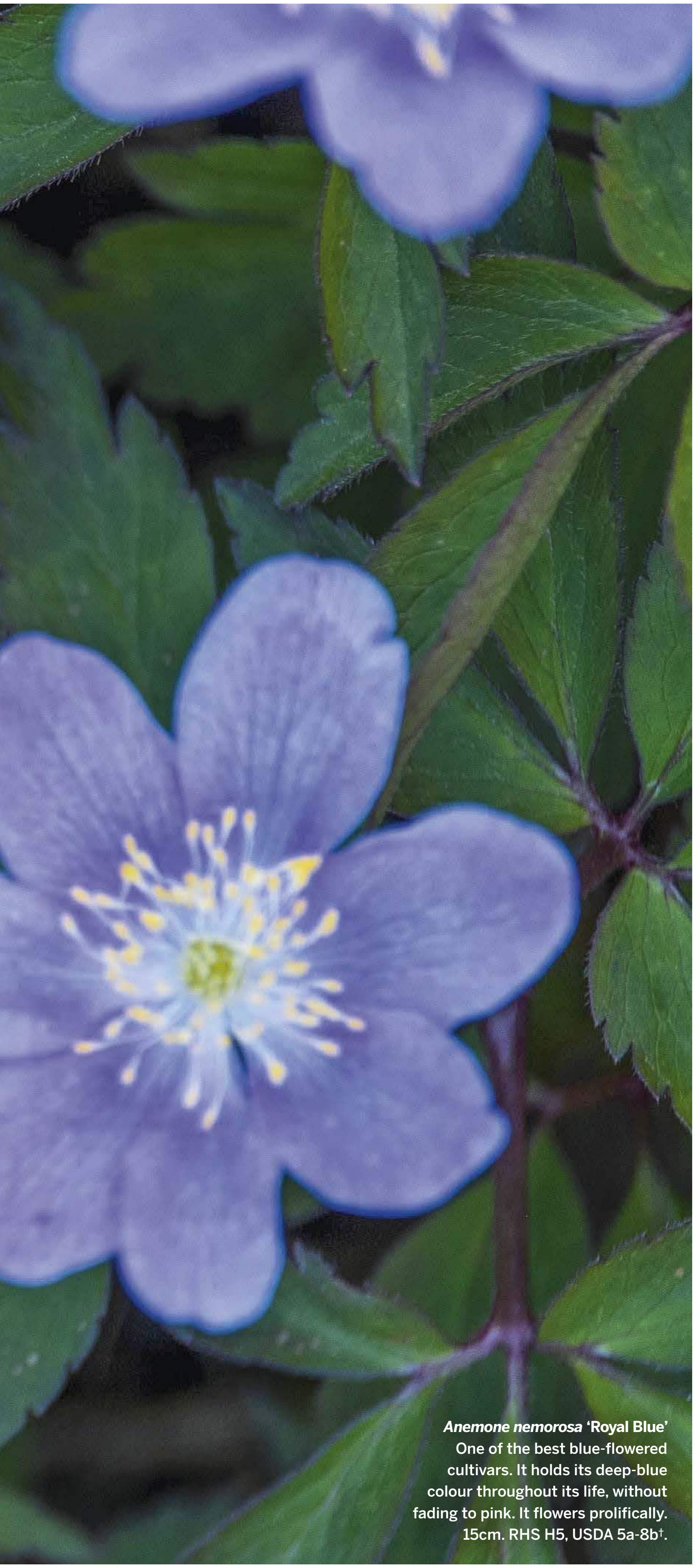
4 & 7 VISIONS. 3. ALL GAP PHOTOS

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

WOOD ANEMONES

There is charm in the simple form of an anemone, and the diversity of plants in the wild has provided rich pickings for enthusiasts

WORDS **JOHN HOYLAND** PHOTOGRAPHS **LYNN KEDDIE**



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Royal Blue'** One of the best blue-flowered cultivars. It holds its deep-blue colour throughout its life, without fading to pink. It flowers prolifically. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b†.

GKSFLORAPICS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

John Hoyland is a plantsman and garden writer who has gardens in both southeast England and southwest France.

My indispensable reference for spring flowers is a tattered copy of EA Bowles's *My Garden in Spring*. Although he was writing a century ago, the advice is always pertinent. Furthermore, he writes with an irresistible passion and humour. 'There is a charm,' he says at the opening of a chapter, 'in the simple form of a single *Anemone* that goes straight to my heart.'

Bowles was referring to a range of genera that carpet woods, copses and shady gardens in spring. Individually, the plants are elfin and demure but en masse, sparkling in the spring sunlight, they are a thrilling sight and the first portent of the season's exuberance.

The principal member of the group is *Anemone nemorosa*, a British native that you would miss if you went looking for it in the woods on a grey day because the flowers close up when the skies are cloudy. As soon as the sun appears the flowers open wide and face upwards to bask in the light and warmth. The plant spreads by a system of thin, twig-like rhizomes that push through the leaf-litter on the woodland floor.

In most parts of the country the flowers are white but in central England many blue forms occur, and in Ireland blue forms often predominate. Nobody consciously breeds *Anemone nemorosa*, but the diversity of plants in the wild has provided rich pickings for eagle-eyed plant enthusiasts, and dozens of selections have been named.

Typical of woodland plants, *Anemone nemorosa* grows quickly at the beginning ▷

PLANT PROFILE

What A group of shade-loving herbaceous perennials composed of several genera, although *Anemone nemorosa* is possibly the best known.

Origins Woodlands and hedgerows in Europe and North America.

Season Spring flowering plants that are dormant during the summer and autumn. Most flower March through to June.

Hardiness Tough plants that are hardy throughout all of the UK.

Size Most reach a height of between 12cm and 20cm, and can often form clumps that are several metres wide.

Conditions Moist but well-drained, humus-rich soil; part shade. Some species will tolerate drier conditions during the dormant period.

*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. †Hardiness ratings given where available.

▷ of spring, flowers, sets seed and dies back before the canopy of leaves completely blocks the light. The height of the plants varies with the growing conditions but most get to about 15cm tall, with the individual flowers about 2cm wide. The coloured part of the flower is made up of, usually, six sepals (the petals have been reduced to nectaries) in a simple rounded shape that Bowles described as having a 'Quakerish loveliness'. Flowering starts in early March and is finished by June, after which there is no sign of the plant until it comes out of dormancy the following spring.

Not all forms of *Anemone nemorosa* are as demure as the wild form; some are utterly mad. In *A. nemorosa* 'Virescens' the sepals and bracts have morphed into tiny green leaves that form a tousled mop. *A. nemorosa* 'Bracteata Pleniflora' has a ruff of green and white bracts and white sepals that are also splashed with green. The flowers are never quite the same from year to year or from plant to plant.

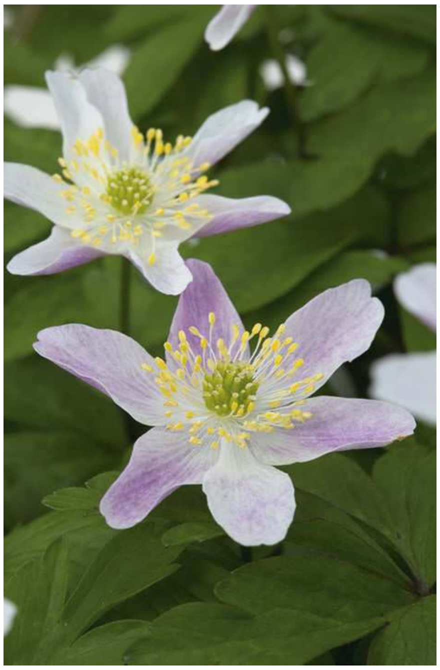
Anemone ranunculoides is a native of central Europe that has very bright buttercup-yellow flowers but with the similar delicate foliage of *A. nemorosa*. It establishes quickly and spreads more rapidly than its cousin. When the two are grown together they often hybridise, with *A. ranunculoides* bringing its yellow flowers to the union. One of the offspring is *Anemone* x *lipsiensis*, a compact plant with pale-yellow flowers.

The earliest of the anemones to flower is *Anemone blanda*. It is naturally variable but the flowers tend to be deep blue and, at up to 5cm across, much larger than those of *A. nemorosa* with narrow sepals. *A. blanda* comes from the eastern Mediterranean and will tolerate both chalky soils and a dry summer.

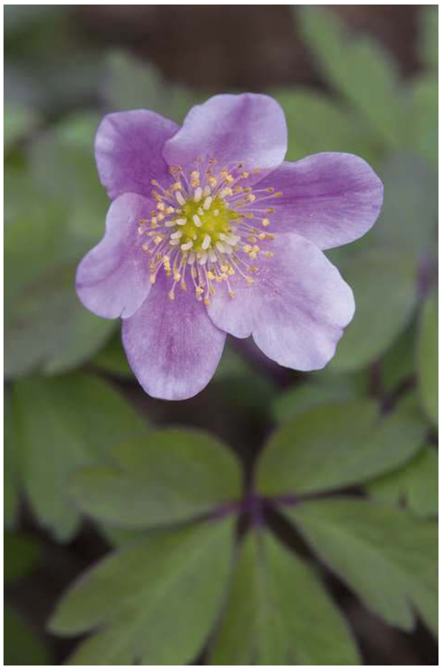
Anemonella thalictroides is a diminutive relative of meadow rue and, although from another genus, it has long been welcomed into the family of wood anemones. Slow to establish and to clump up, it is not as easy to please as the true anemones, preferring a slightly acid soil. If the soil is too wet, the tubers will rot, but in the perfect situation it will seed itself about, often producing variations from its normally white flowers.

All of these woodland plants can light up a shady garden in spring. Where shade is lacking, tuck them around later-flowering perennials. My favourite use is in rough short grass in a happy jumble with celandines, *Cyclamen hederifolium*, *Scilla bifolia* and a few clumps of hellebores. It is a sight that, as Mr Bowles would say, goes straight to the heart.

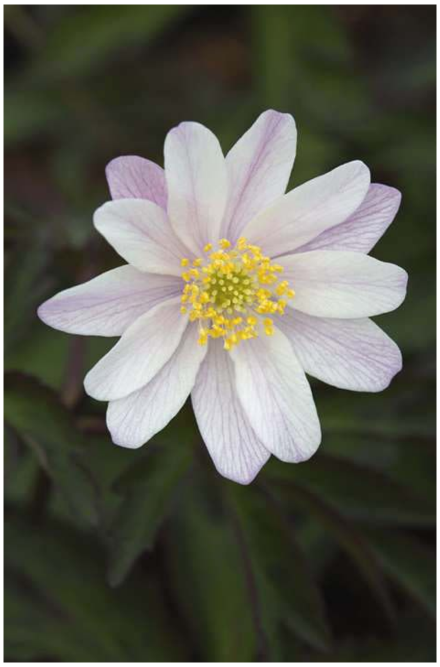
• John's recommendations for wood anemones continue over the next six pages.



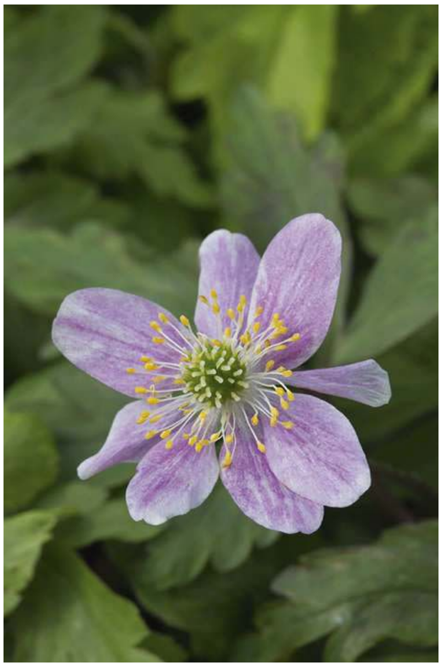
Anemone nemorosa **'Cedric's Pink'**
Like many pink-flowered forms, the flowers open white then develop a pink tinge before finishing a purple-pink. It is also one of the earliest to flower. 15cm. RHS H7, USDA 5a-8b.



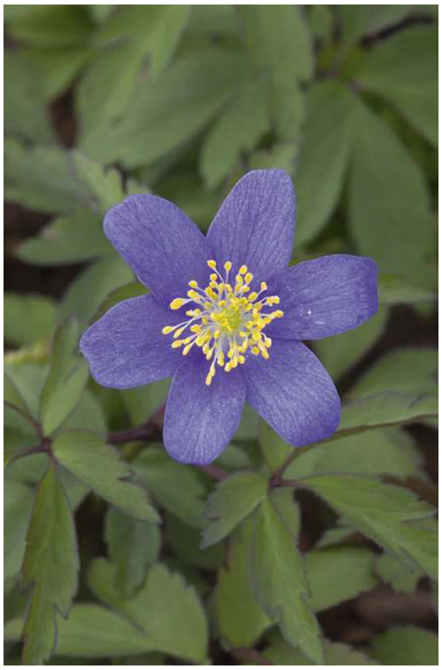
Anemone nemorosa **'Bill Baker's Pink'**
Pink-flowered forms are common in woodlands in central England, particularly Berkshire, where this one was found. The flowers have a lilac tinge when they open and fade to pink. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



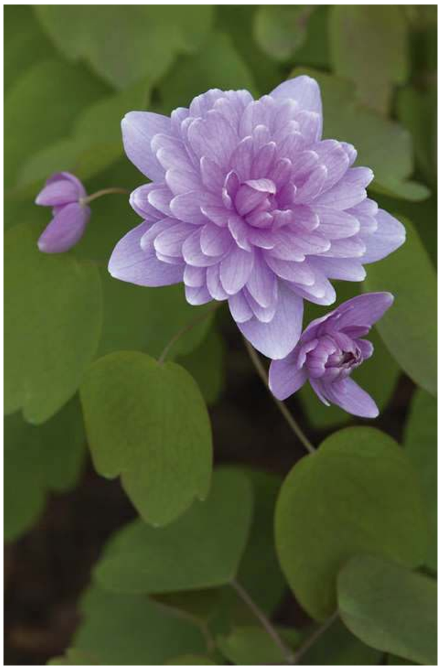
Anemone nemorosa **'Evelyn Meadows'**
The original plant was found in the Picos de Europa mountains in Spain by galanthophile Richard Nutt. The foliage has a dark-purple sheen and the reverse of the petals is deep pink. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



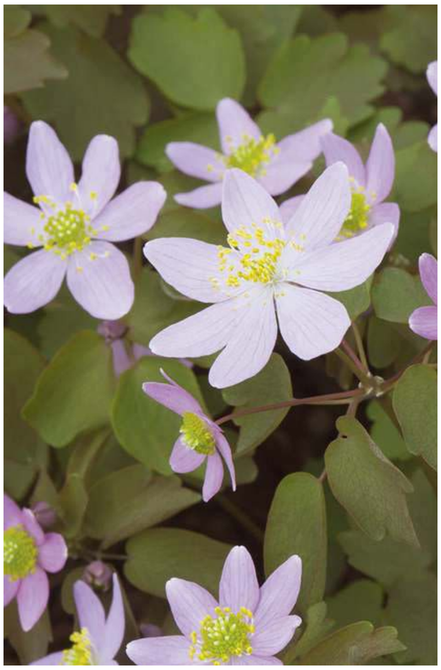
Anemone nemorosa **'Slack Top Pink'**
Found as a seedling a decade ago by plantsman Michael Mitchell, and named after his Yorkshire nursery. Michael selected it for its open flowers and neat habit. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



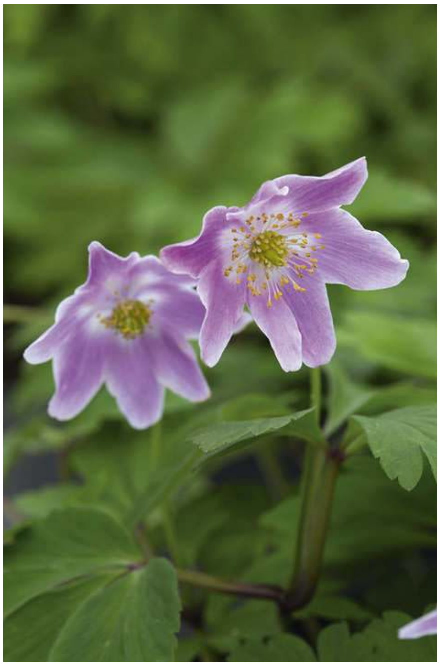
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Lismore Blue'**
A floriferous cultivar from Ireland with a neat, compact habit and large, lavender-blue flowers. This was the preferred cultivar of the renowned plantsman Christopher Lloyd. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



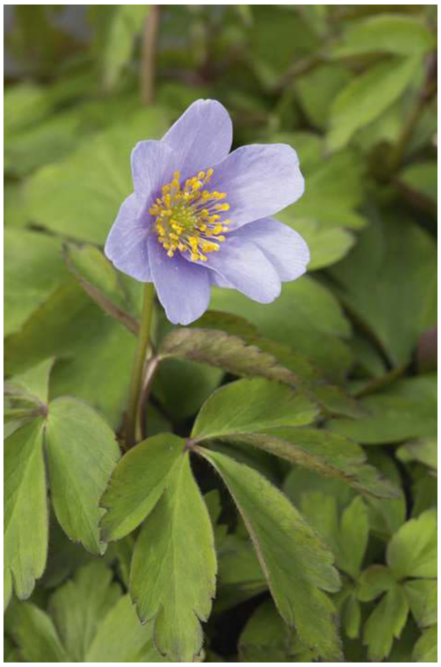
***Anemonella thalictroide*s f. *rosea* 'Oscar Schoaf'**
A delicate form with double, pink flowers, resembling a miniature pincushion. Found in a graveyard in Minnesota. Slow-growing so not often sold. 12cm. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.



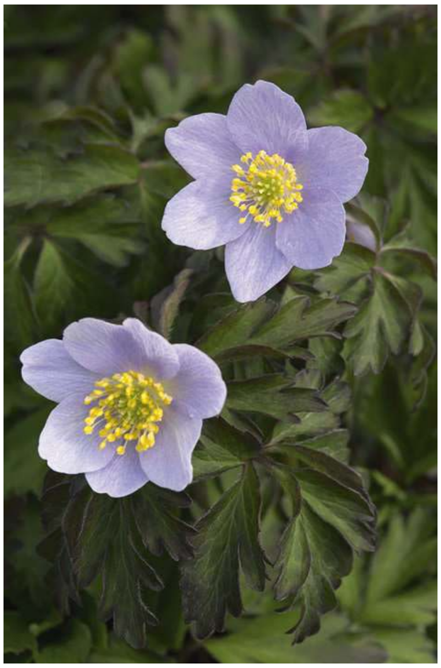
Anemonella thalictroides* f. *rosea
Often produces pink flowers, this selection has been named because the flowers are much darker than most. The plant is slow to develop and in ideal conditions reaches about 10cm tall. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



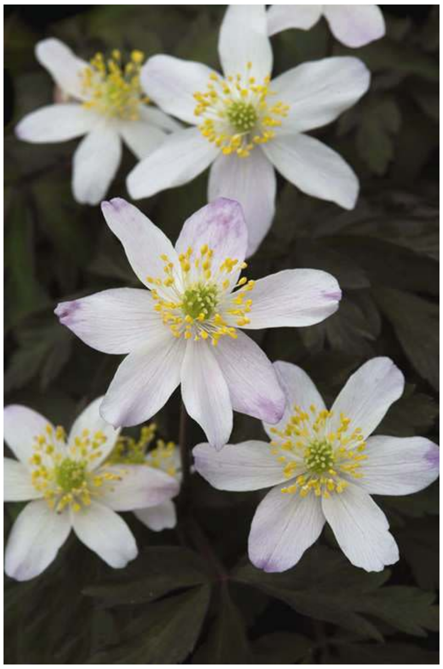
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Flushing'**
A vigorous cultivar that seems to spread more quickly than most others. The flower has a slightly nodding habit, which allows you to see the pink reverse of the flower. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



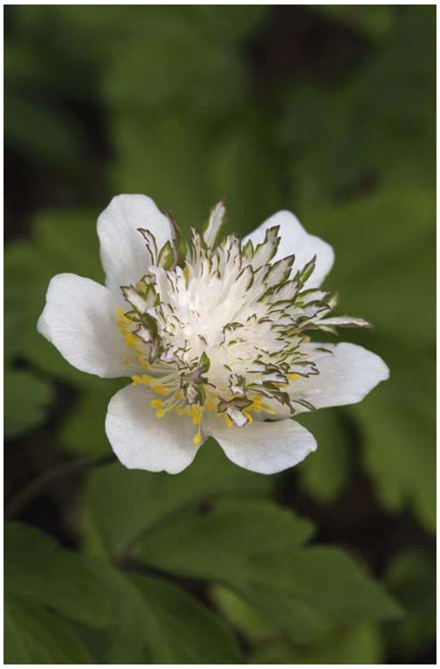
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana'**
A cultivar that has stood the test of time. It is one that EA Bowles wrote about and is named for the gardener William Robinson. The flowers are a pale, washed-out, lavender blue. 20cm. AGM*. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



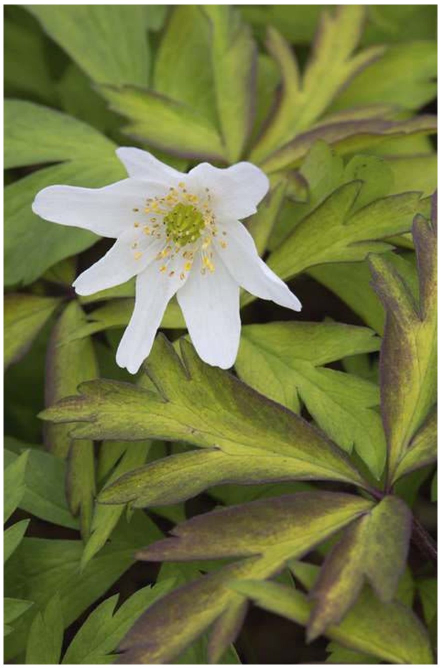
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Parlez Vous'**
Despite the awfulness of the First World War in France, plantsman Frank Waley was able to botanise and found this cultivar in France. It is one of the most vigorous of the family. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



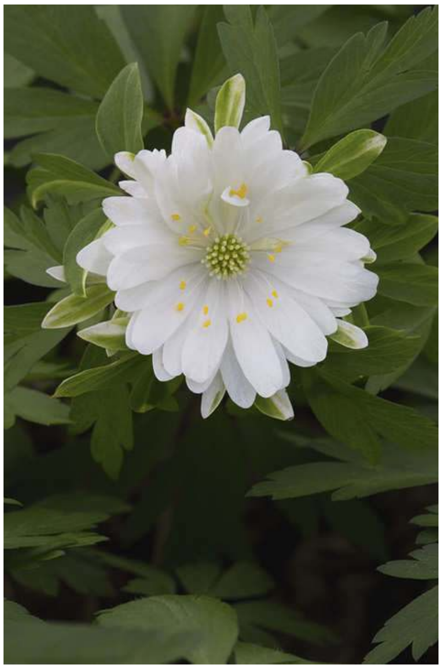
***Anemone nemorosa* 'La Rochanne'**
A recent introduction from the Netherlands with almost-black foliage, that shows off the brightness of the flowers. Despite the dark foliage it produces lots of flowers. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



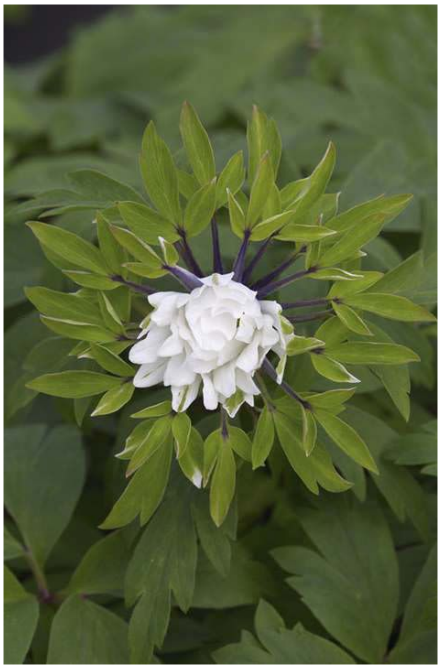
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Salt and Pepper'**
An unusual and rare cultivar, with a curious central boss of nectaries and stamens that have become petaloid, surrounded by white sepals edged in dark green, giving it a two-tone effect. 12cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



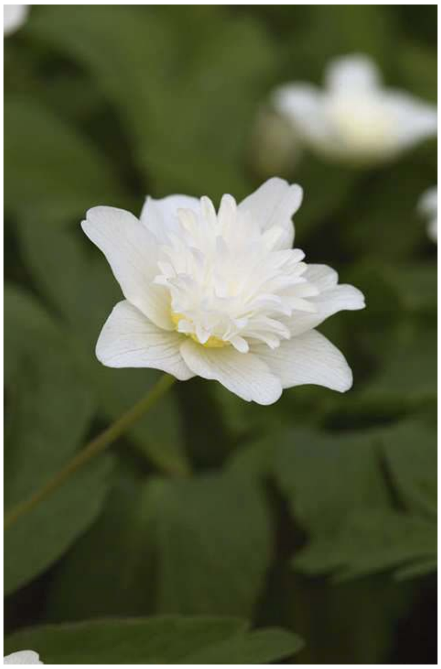
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Glyncock Gold'**
This was found by Brian Dockerill, a champion of variegated plants, and named after his village in Wales. The new foliage has a rusty-red edge and matures to olive green. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



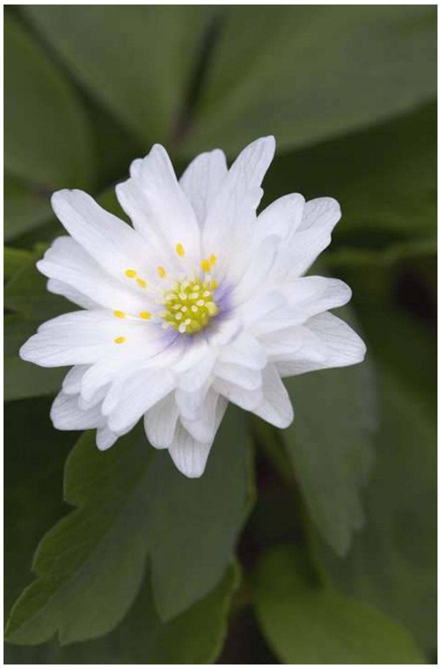
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Ploeger's Plena'**
A vigorous cultivar that reputedly flowers much earlier than others, with mint-green and white bracts and white sepals. The same plant is also being sold as 'Ploeger de Bilt'. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



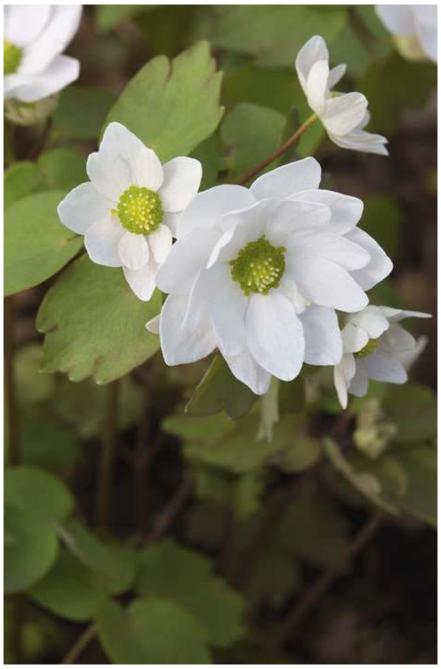
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Bracteata Pleniflora'**
No wood anemone could be called flamboyant but this one gets close. As its name suggests, the flower is a combination of bracts, which form an eye-catching ruff, and sepals. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



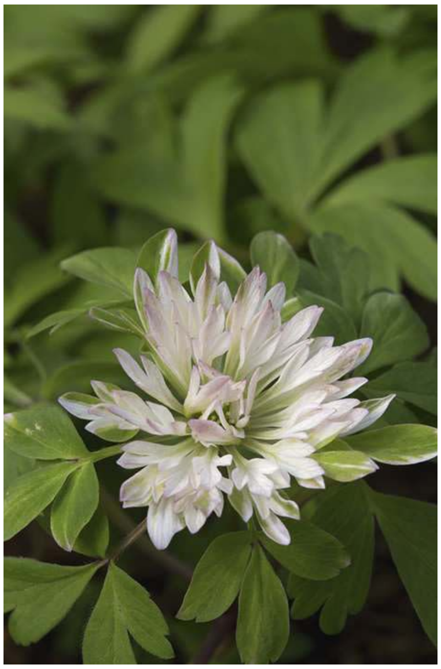
***Anemone nemorosa* 'Vestal'**
A beautiful and robust cultivar with flowers that have a central white cushion made up of stamens that have become petaloid, sitting on a corona of white petals. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



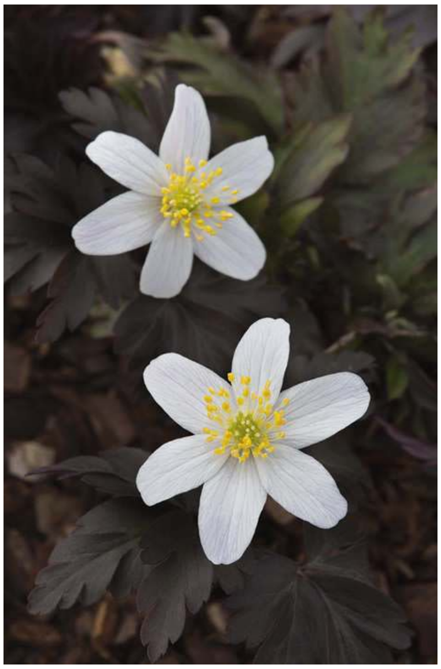
***Anemone nemorosa* ‘Blue Eyes’**
A beautiful but erratic plant, which in some years has a pronounced blue centre when the flower opens, in other years it is very faint. The blue always eventually fades to white. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemonella thalictroides* ‘Snowflakes’**
Introduced by Fernwood Nursery in Maine, USA, these elegant flowers look delicate but are tough enough to stand up to wind and rain during the blustery weather of April and May. 12cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* ‘Stammerberg’**
The name refers to the mountain in Austria where this cultivar was recently found. The sepals are finely cut, almost filigree, with a pale-pink sheen on the white background. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* dark leaf form**
Seedlings with dark foliage appear regularly in the wild and several nurseries sell forms with dark leaves. In general the flowers are simple, pure white, typical of the species. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.

Cultivation

- Although in the wild *Anemone nemorosa* grows in even the densest woodland shade, it flowers more profusely in clearings where light reaches the woodland floor or in places where the trees have been recently coppiced. Similarly in the garden, anemones will flower in the shade cast by buildings or fences but flower most abundantly when growing around deciduous shrubs or among later-flowering perennials.
- As important as shade is moisture and humus. None of the woodland anemones thrive in either dry soils or very rich soils, which tend to produce plants with lots of foliage and not many flowers. The ideal open and friable soil can be achieved by adding lots of leaf mould or composted bark to the soil when you plant your anemones. Thereafter, when the plants are dormant, mulch the area every few years with a thick layer of leaf mould. In some years the plants are affected by powdery mildew or leaf spot. This can blemish the foliage but neither are fatal so not worth getting agitated about.
- Nurseries sell *Anemone nemorosa* either as growing plants in small pots or as bare corms, which look like pieces of thin twig. I find that the plants that are pot grown establish more quickly and more reliably than the bare corms. *Anemone blanda* corms are much tougher and can be reliably bought as dried corms. Remember that anemones go dormant soon after they have finished flowering, so to avoid putting a fork or trowel through them when weeding it is a good idea to mark where they are.
- After a few years the plants make a mat of thin rhizomes, which should be divided every few years if you want to create a carpet of the plants. Regular division will also ensure that your plants flower well and that you will have a few to pass on to friends. Simply dig the plant up when it is dormant, carefully tease the rhizomes apart and then replant the pieces.

Where to plant

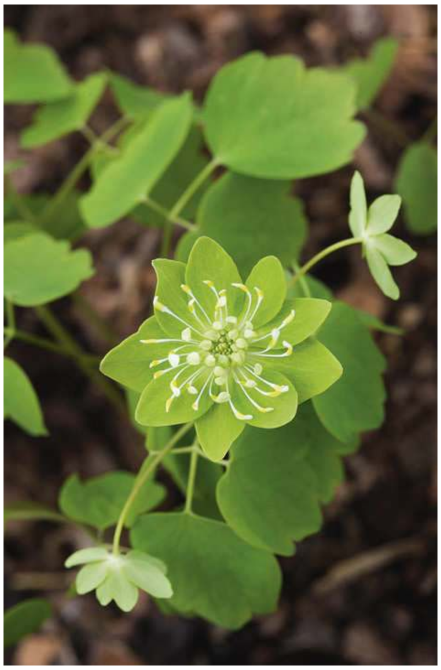
- Woodland anemones look impressive in the garden when they carry the baton on from snowdrops, and can be planted to cover the soil under trees that later in the year would be too shaded for most plants. They are also perfect companions to magnolias and amelanchier, providing pools of flowers for the shrubs to float above.

- The conventional wisdom – and one that I have followed – says that woodland anemones will not thrive in pots but Brian Ellis, nurseryman at Avondale Nursery in Warwickshire where the National Collection of *Anemone nemorosa* is held, assures me that this is not true. He grows the entire collection in large (10L) pots using ordinary multipurpose compost. Each year he strips away the soil at the top and at the bottom of the pot and replaces it with fresh compost that has a slow-release fertiliser added. "You end up with a sort of Camembert effect," he says, "with the twiggy mass of the plant sandwiched between layers of compost." Keep the pots well watered and in the shade, especially during the summer.

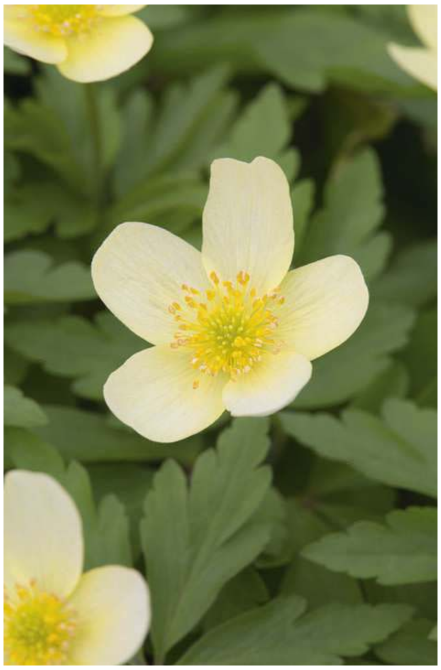
Where to see and buy

- **Avondale Nursery***
  Russell's Nursery, Mill Hill,
  Baginton, Warwickshire CV8 3AG.
  Tel 024 7667 3662,
  avondalenursery.co.uk
- **Ballyrobert Gardens**
  154 Ballyrobert Road, Ballyclare,
  Northern Ireland BT39 9RT.
  Tel 028 9344 0101,
  ballyrobertgardens.com
- **Edrom Nurseries**
  Coldingham, Eyemouth,
  Berwickshire TD14 5TZ.
  Tel 01890 771386,
  edrom-nurseries.co.uk
- **Kingston Lacy***
  Wimborne, Dorset BH21 4EA.
  Tel 01202 883402,
  nationaltrust.org.uk/
  kingston-lacy
- **Long Acre Plants**
  Southmarsh, nr Wincanton,
  Somerset BA9 8EX.
  Tel 01963 32802,
  plantsforshade.co.uk
- **Pottertons Nursery**
  Cottage Nursery, Moortown
  Road, Market Rasen,
  Lincolnshire LN7 6HX.
  Tel 01472 851714,
  pottertons.co.uk

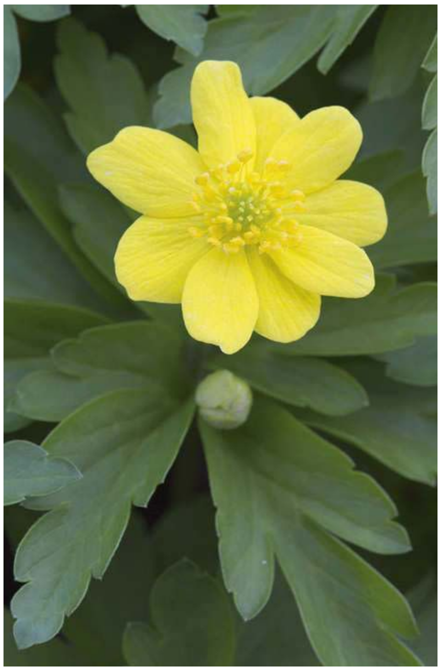
*National Collection holders.



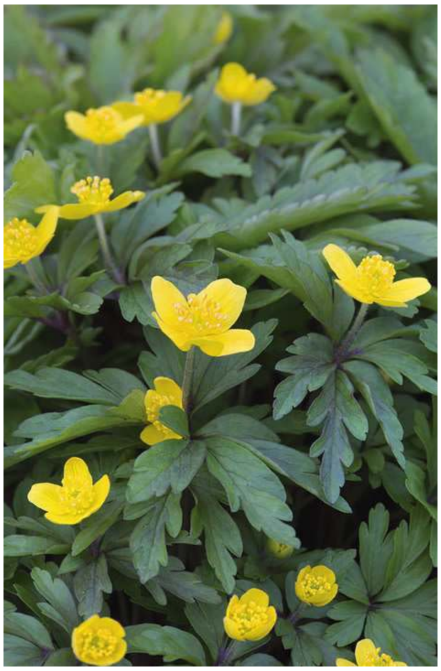
***Anemonella thalictroides* 'Green Hurricane'**
The curious green flowers nestle in the plant's foliage and are easy to miss. Narrow, white petals develop into the shape of a child's pinwheel. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



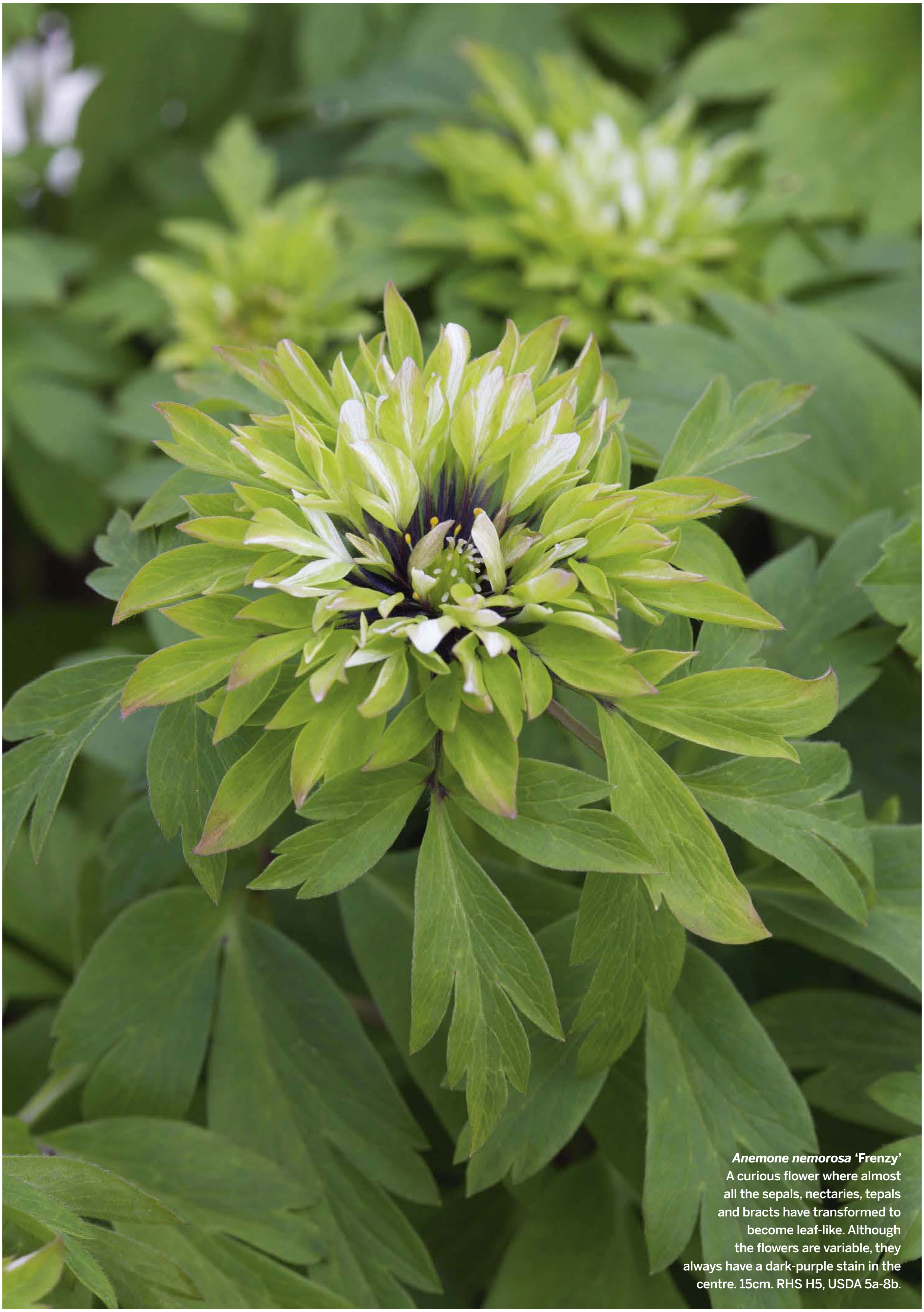
***Anemone* x *lipsiensis* 'Vindobonensis'**
An old cultivar from the Vienna woods. It has creamy-yellow flowers that appear in mid-April and which continue to the end of June. The new foliage has a red sheen. 18-20cm. RHS H5.



***Anemone ranunculoides* 'Frank Waley'**
Another plant from the collection of Frank Waley, made a century ago. He selected it for having much larger flowers than the species. It is also more vigorous. 20cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



***Anemone ranunculoides* 'Laciniata'**
Attractive, deeply cut leaves and reddish stems that hold the large flowers above the foliage. The flowers are a lustrous yellow, reminiscent of buttercups. It flowers in April and May. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.



***Anemone nemorosa* 'Frenzy'**
A curious flower where almost all the sepals, nectaries, tepals and bracts have transformed to become leaf-like. Although the flowers are variable, they always have a dark-purple stain in the centre. 15cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-8b.

MANY THANKS TO BRIAN AND STEPH ELLIS AT AVONDALE NURSERY IN WARWICKSHIRE WHERE THESE IMAGES WERE TAKEN.

HORTICULTURAL WHO'S WHO

NICK BAILEY

The former head gardener at the Chelsea Physic Garden on dabbling in ponds, teaching gardening skills to disadvantaged young people and finding new ways to display snowdrops

WORDS **ANNIE GATTI** PORTRAIT **CHARLIE HOPKINSON**

When Nick Bailey made his first Chelsea Flower Show appearance, aged 40, in 2016 with a show garden that celebrated patterns in plants and featured many southern hemisphere species, people wondered who this talented new designer was. In fact, Nick, whose day job was head gardener at the Chelsea Physic Garden, had been designing and reshaping gardens since the age of 19 when he was studying landscape design. It's just that he'd also packed in several other careers on the way: nursery horticulturist, teacher, hands-on gardener, writer and editor, and broadcaster. But after Chelsea he became a much more familiar face when BBC's *Gardeners' World* took him on as part of the expanded team, where his rolled-up-sleeves approach and clear, unpatronising advice to garden owners have won him many fans.

Nick grew up in Norfolk, in a family of teachers, and admits he was a rather unusual ten-year-old, who, when friends came knocking at the door after school, instructed his mother to say that he was grounded so that he could get on with making the ponds in his part of the garden. "Both my parents and great-grandparents had huge, beautiful gardens, so that was the norm for me." He learned the craft of gardening from them, but the design fire had also been kindled. "I remember being so excited about spending my pocket money on a single fencing panel to divide up my part of the garden," he says. Later he was to discover, and devour, John Brookes's book *Garden Design*.

> WE NEED TO OPEN PEOPLE'S EYES TO OUR DEPENDENCE ON PLANTS FOR EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES, FROM FOOD, TO CLOTHES, TO BUILDINGS, TO FUEL

His sandwich year on the National Diploma in Landscape and Amenities Horticulture was spent working at Waltham Place, Strilli Oppenheimer's organic garden in Berkshire, which gave him the confidence to take on his first major redesign, at the five-acre combe garden in Dorset belonging to George and Elizabeth Davies (of retailer Next). He returned to work for the Oppenheimers in their 42-acre garden, Brenthurst, in Johannesburg, which, he says, was probably the best year in his life. "I worked with incredible horticulturists and was given carte blanche on budgets and design to create new landscapes." In contrast, his next job was for a charity, teaching horticultural skills to young people on the edge of society. "It was incredibly challenging, but also rewarding." In a year, the social hierarchy changed, with the highest kudos for those who knew the most botanical names rather than those who could punch the hardest.

After a spell editing and writing for garden magazines, he returned to gardening as head gardener of ten acres of walled gardens in Norfolk where he persuaded the owners, who had asked for a neat-and-tidy, mainly turf approach, to allow him to create a series of plant-rich seasonal gardens instead. Four years later, he was on the move again, this time to the greatest challenge of his career: the role of head gardener at the Chelsea Physic Garden, where he would have a staff of six gardeners and some 80 volunteers. "This was a dream role," he admits. "It was a charity, it provided resources for active research, and it had this incredible collection of 5,000 very unusual plants. The most enticing bit was becoming acquainted with the hundreds of plants whose names I'd never even seen written down." But he also knew that he needed to make the garden more accessible, both physically and intellectually.

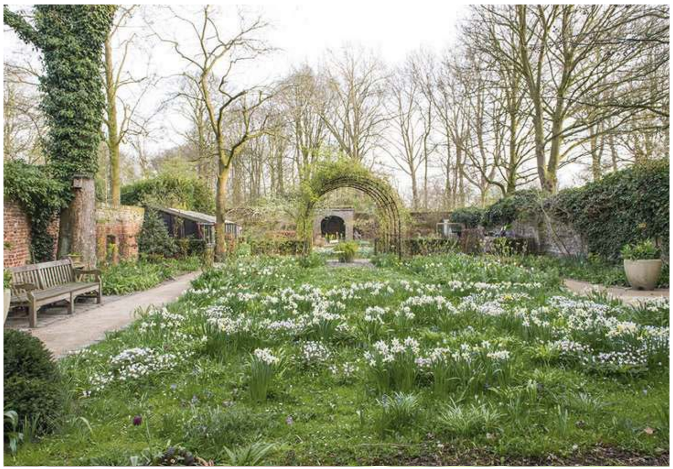
"The essence of any botanic garden has to be education and conservation. We need to open people's eyes to our fundamental dependence on plants for every aspect of our lives, from food, to clothes, to buildings, to fuel. So many people who are not involved in horticulture or gardening see plants as a frivolity rather than the essence of everything we are." His masterplan involved transforming the garden into a series of garden areas, akin to a museum, where the collections were regrouped according to their uses (historic and future), and phyto-geographic and chronological connections. Even the garden's snowdrop collection got a facelift: more than 100 new cultivars were added, and ingenious ways of presenting them, often at waist or head height, were devised, including a tunnel of snowdrop-studded kokedama balls, and 'meadows' of different cultivars planted among *Ophiopogon planiscapus* 'Nigrescens'.

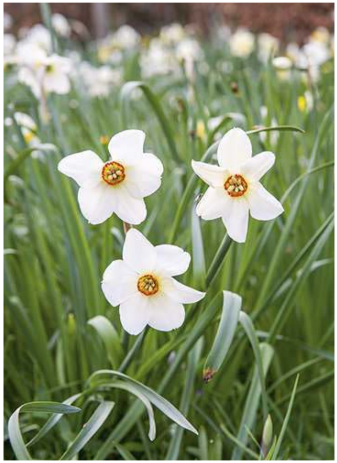
While Nick has nothing but praise for the work of the volunteers, their use creates a dichotomy that other managers and head gardeners of public gardens will recognise: "I had to patch up shortfalls with volunteers and was then told I didn't need another permanent gardener. It means there are fewer roles for qualified gardeners, and it keeps wages suppressed."

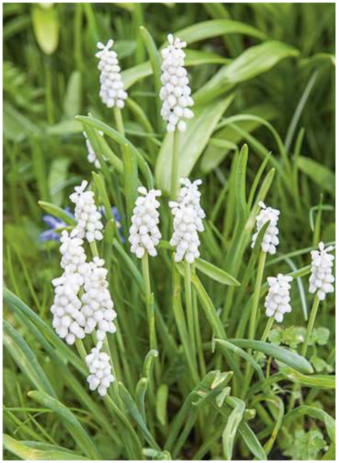
Last summer, Nick left Chelsea Physic to go solo. His new business card reads 'Garden Maker, Author, Speaker'. Whatever the future holds for this ambitious horticulturist, it will, he says, include "keeping my hands in the mud". The physical work with plants and soil is clearly what keeps him rooted. □

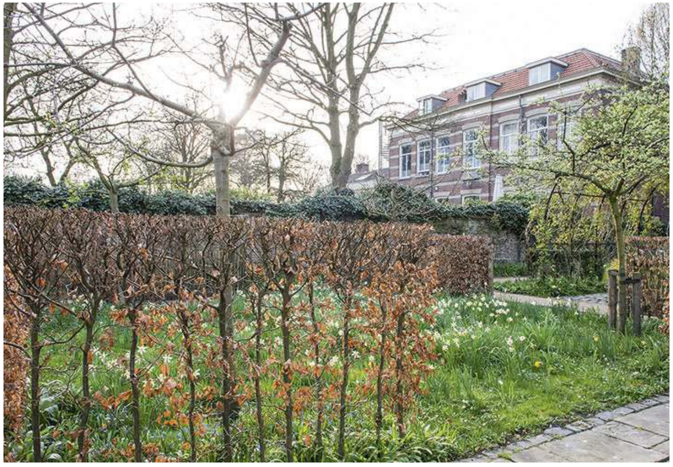
USEFUL INFORMATION
Revive Your Garden by Nick Bailey is published by Kyle Books in April, priced £25.

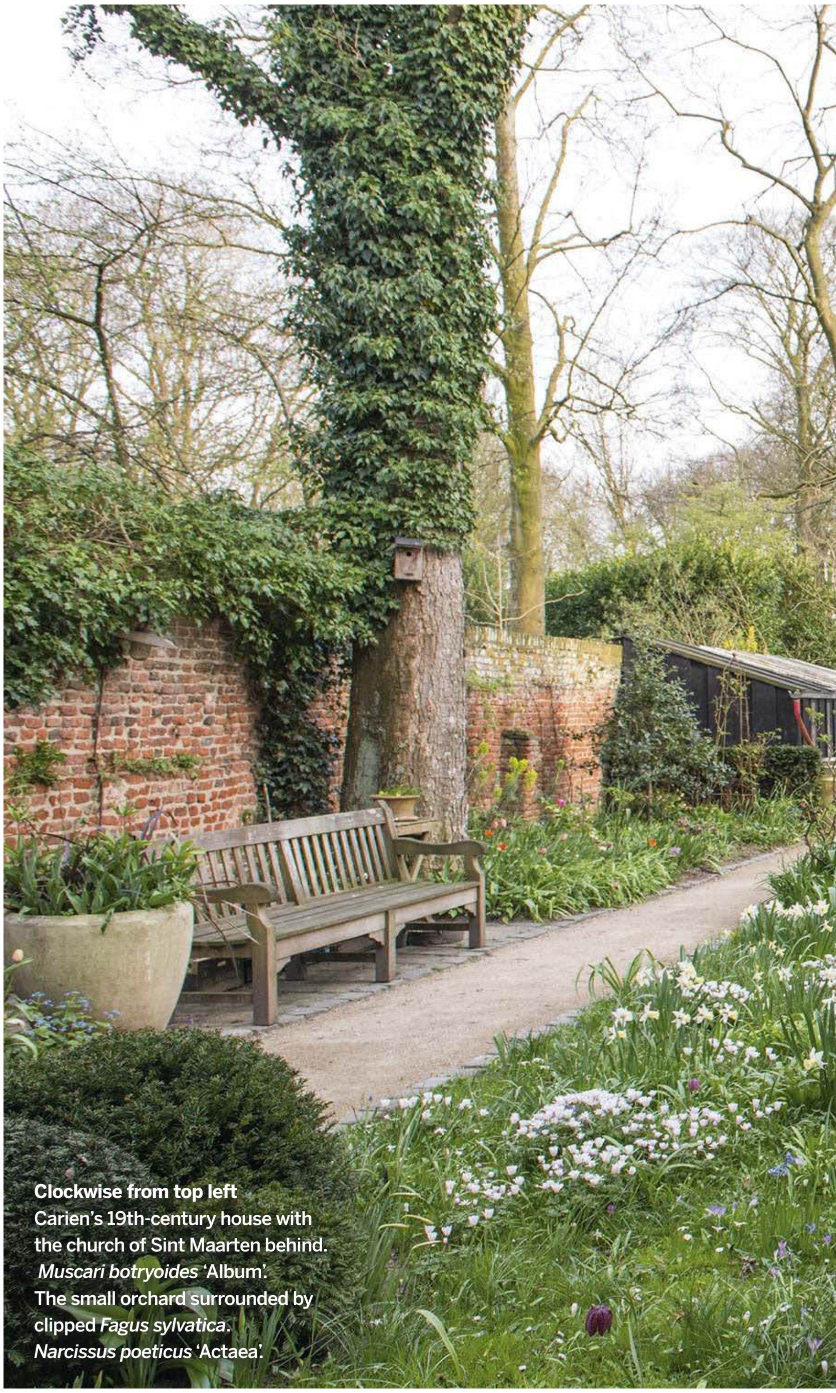
NEXT MONTH Spanish landscape designer Fernando Caruncho.









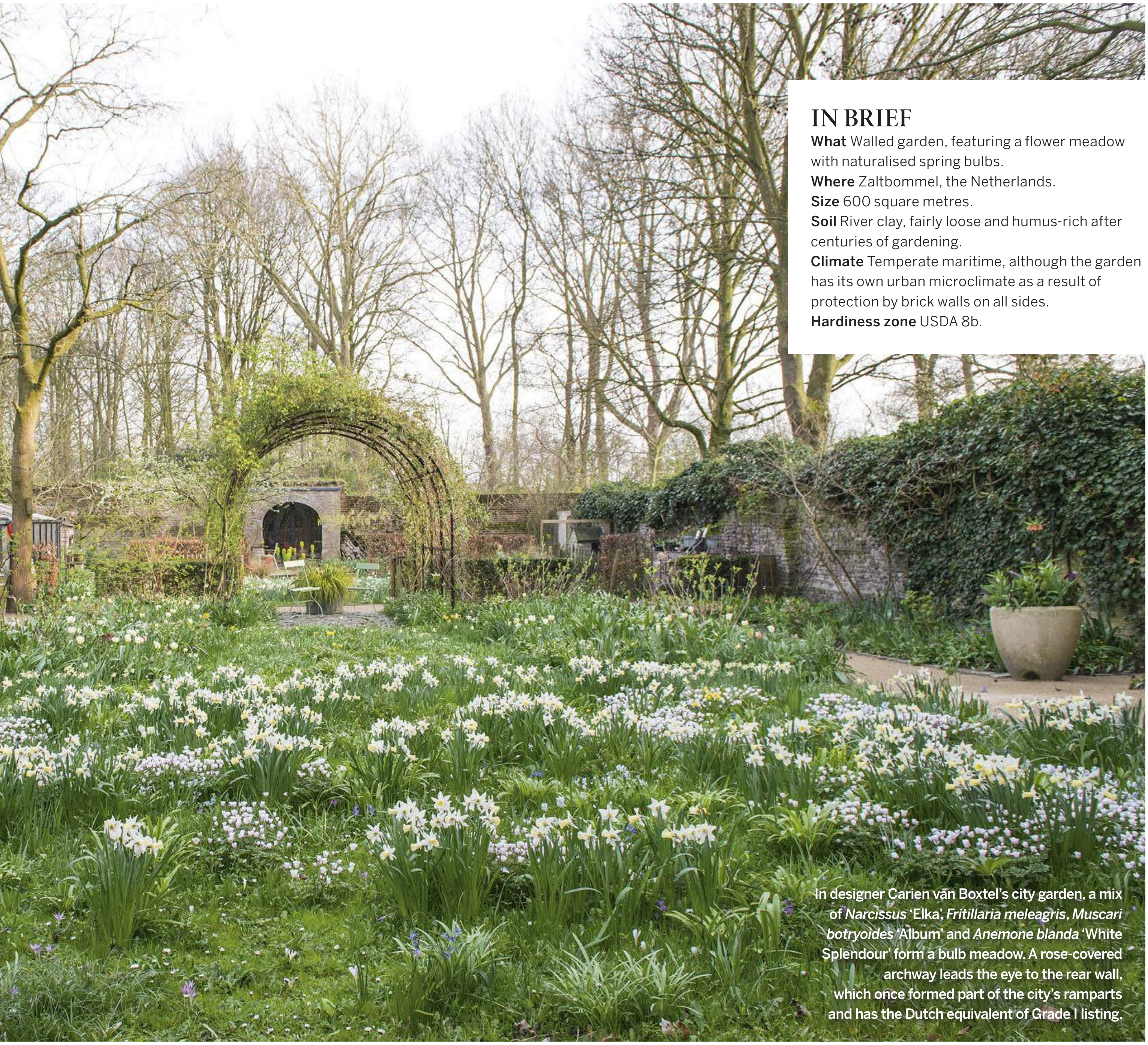


Clockwise from top left
Carien's 19th-century house with the church of Sint Maarten behind. *Muscari botryoides* 'Album'. The small orchard surrounded by clipped *Fagus sylvatica*. *Narcissus poeticus* 'Actaea'.

ENCLOSURE ACT

A small walled garden in the Dutch city of Zaltbommel is the stage for a mini-meadow of naturalised spring bulbs

WORDS SIMONE VAN HEININGEN PHOTOGRAPHS MAAYKE DE RIDDER



IN BRIEF

What Walled garden, featuring a flower meadow with naturalised spring bulbs.
Where Zaltbommel, the Netherlands.
Size 600 square metres.
Soil River clay, fairly loose and humus-rich after centuries of gardening.
Climate Temperate maritime, although the garden has its own urban microclimate as a result of protection by brick walls on all sides.
Hardiness zone USDA 8b.

In designer Carien van Boxtel's city garden, a mix of *Narcissus* 'Elka', *Fritillaria meleagris*, *Muscari botryoides* 'Album' and *Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour' form a bulb meadow. A rose-covered archway leads the eye to the rear wall, which once formed part of the city's ramparts and has the Dutch equivalent of Grade I listing.

My husband wanted a lawn," says garden designer Carien van Boxtel. Admittedly, he did not mean a manicured, sit-on-mower kind of lawn, rather the 'let's kick a ball about' variety. But as I step into Carien's garden, I am pretty sure he got more than he expected. It is a *hortus conclusus*, behind a 19th-century vicarage-turned-schoolmaster's house and now family home, at the foot of the 15th-century church of Sint Maarten in Zaltbommel. The garden's rear wall dates back to the 12th century and at one time formed part of the city's ramparts. Barrister-turned-garden designer Carien and her family moved here 13 years ago. "Gardening is part of my genetic make-up," she says. "My father and grandfather were avid fans of the garden designer Mien Ruys, and when I was a law student in Amsterdam, my digs were next door to her office." It must have been fate. Despite running a successful law practice, Carien changed career and enrolled in a four-year garden design course at Larenstein University.

Carien hired Arend Jan van der Horst to lay out a design for her garden, but was determined to choose the planting herself. "There is more to designing a garden than putting in plants: the effect of light and shade, the spatial play with perspective and levels, a sense of cohesive composition," she says. The original garden was traditional. Following Arend Jan's advice, Carien took down some trees and started filling borders with plants from her former home. Everything, including an archway found in a local orchard, was brought in via a small door from a neighbour's garden. To the left and right of the archway are modest vegetable plots, and behind it a mini-orchard hedged with *Fagus sylvatica*, where *Pyrus communis* 'Doyenne du Comice' and *Prunus domestica* ▷

“A GARDEN IS NEVER FINISHED, SO THERE IS NO USE STRIVING FOR PERFECTION”

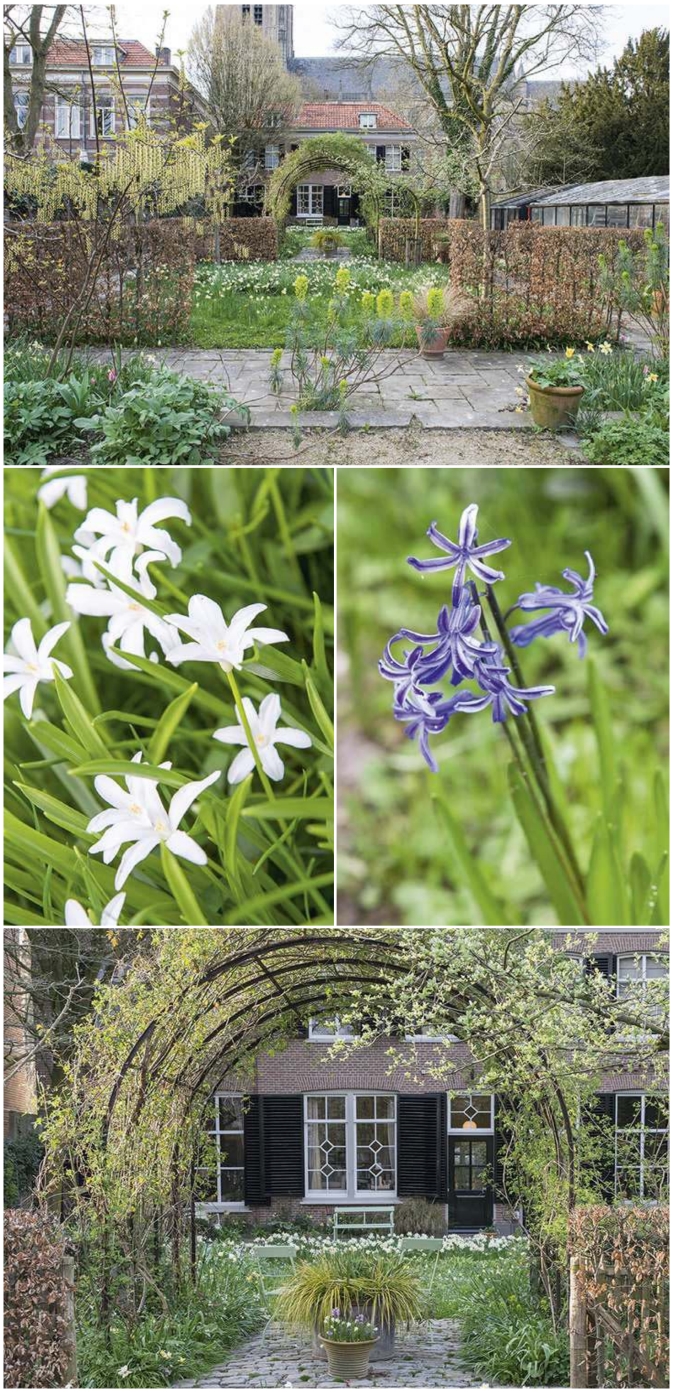
Parallel paths lead to a seating area at the back of the garden, with a table, and chairs from Fermob’s Luxembourg range. Behind is the shrub, *Stachyurus praecox*, with its pendant racemes of small, white flowers that in spring appear to drip from the branches.

▷ ‘Early Prolific’ bathe in a white swathe of *Narcissus* ‘Seagull’ and ‘Mrs Langtry’. The layout is structured, but the planting is loose and billowy. Carien’s solution to grass was simple and beautiful: a wide lawn stretches out along most of the garden, becoming a flower meadow in spring. *Narcissus*, *Chionodoxa luciliae* ‘Alba’, *Muscari botryoides* ‘Album’ and *Scilla siberica* are naturalised, flowering in shades of white and green.

The garden has become a test lab for Carien’s assignments, including a bulb garden for the Rijksmuseum, and a floral pattern of 90,000 bulbs around her local church. She is also a consultant for one of the Netherlands’ largest bulb suppliers, JUB Holland. “Most people see bulbs as an ‘extra’. But I treat them as a separate phase in any planting scheme. I love their transience and flexibility,” says Carien. In mid-April, the tulips kick in: “Perfect, because that is a time when perennials are still mostly leaves.” But it’s not just tulips, as Carien wants to avoid a colour-blocking effect. “Beautiful, but not for me. Cammasias are wonderful in a flower meadow, and for scent, I love *Muscari* ‘Baby’s Breath’.” She is fairly laid back in her approach. “A garden is never finished, so there is no use striving for perfection. I’m not a fan of herbicides and there is no such thing as a weed. Up to a point, of course. Because you will see me hoovering the seedheads off dandelions.” □

USEFUL INFORMATION

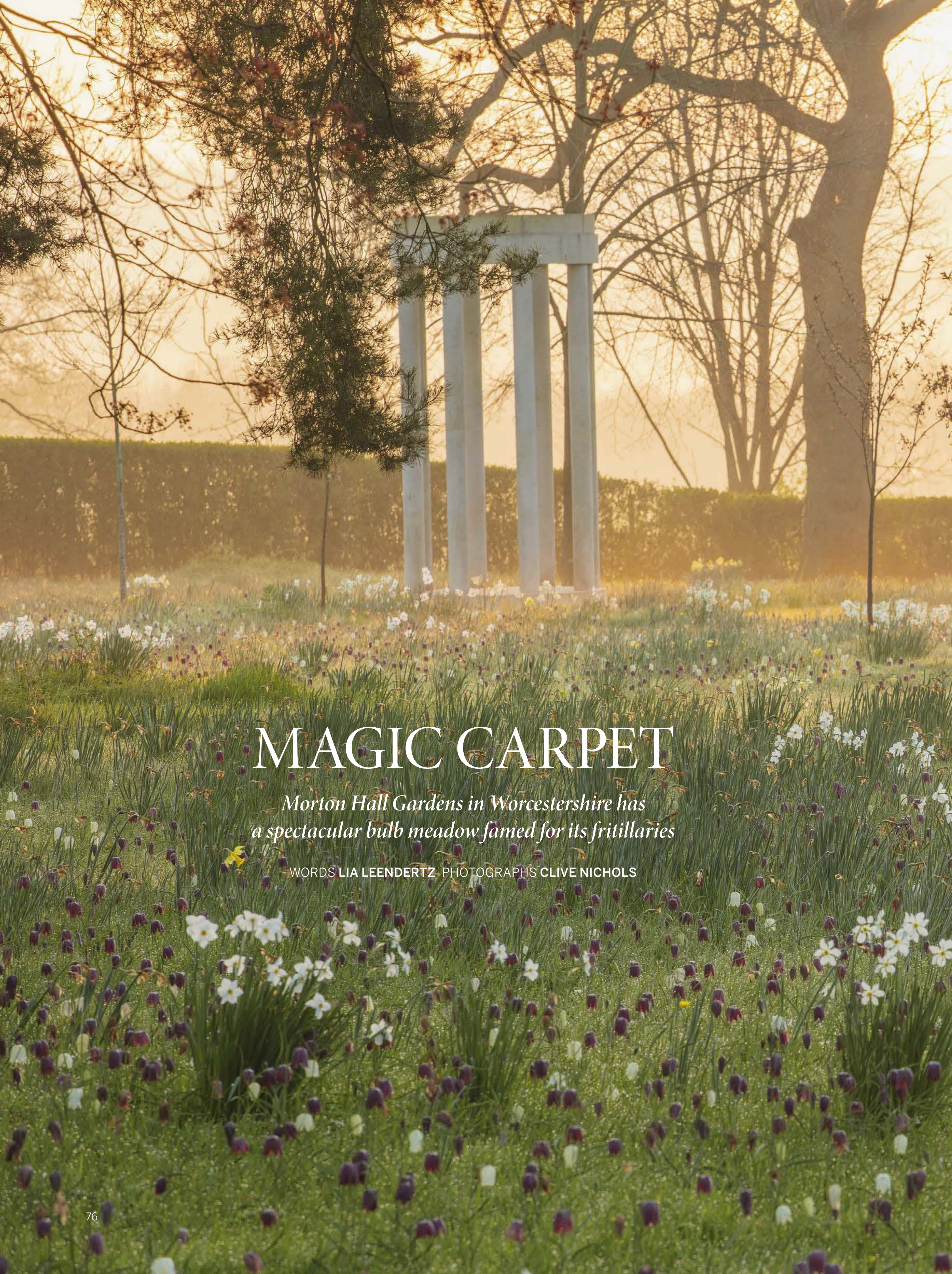
Address Kerkplein 14, 5301 EK Zaltblommel, the Netherlands. **Website** carienvanboxtel.com **Open** By appointment only.



Clockwise from top right
View from the back of the garden, with self-seeding *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii* in the centre foreground. *Hyacinthus orientalis* 'Anastasia'. Rambling roses and early flowering climbers cover an archway. *Chionodoxa luciliae* 'Alba'.

USING BULBS IN THE GARDEN

1. Use white-flowering bulbs to light up dark corners of the garden, especially in spring when the sun is still low.
2. If you love late-flowering tulips, put them in pots dotted around your garden. This is because by the time they flower, at a mere 40cm tall, they will simply disappear among everything else in your borders.
3. In a small garden, be mindful that you don't overdo it by planting lots of bulbs. It may be better to opt instead for attractive, moveable containers here and there. Add (evergreen) grasses such as *Carex* for a mini-meadow effect or evergreen ferns and other woodland plants to create a mini-woodland meadow.
4. Consider the shapes and colours of the leaves of surrounding perennials when selecting your bulbs. Dark tulips are great with *Geum, Persicaria*, *Thalictrum* and *Geranium* cultivars, especially the early flowering *Geranium phaeum*. Elegant *Polygonatum* and *Lunaria rediviva* are also perfect companions for tulips.
5. Some bulbs are true shade-lovers. *Erythronium*, for instance, is perfect if you want to introduce a flash of colour in a difficult spot.



MAGIC CARPET

Morton Hall Gardens in Worcestershire has a spectacular bulb meadow famed for its fritillaries

WORDS **LIA LEENDERTZ** PHOTOGRAPHS **CLIVE NICHOLS**

IN BRIEF

Name Morton Hall Gardens.

What Late Georgian house surrounded by modern garden and meadows.

Where Worcestershire.

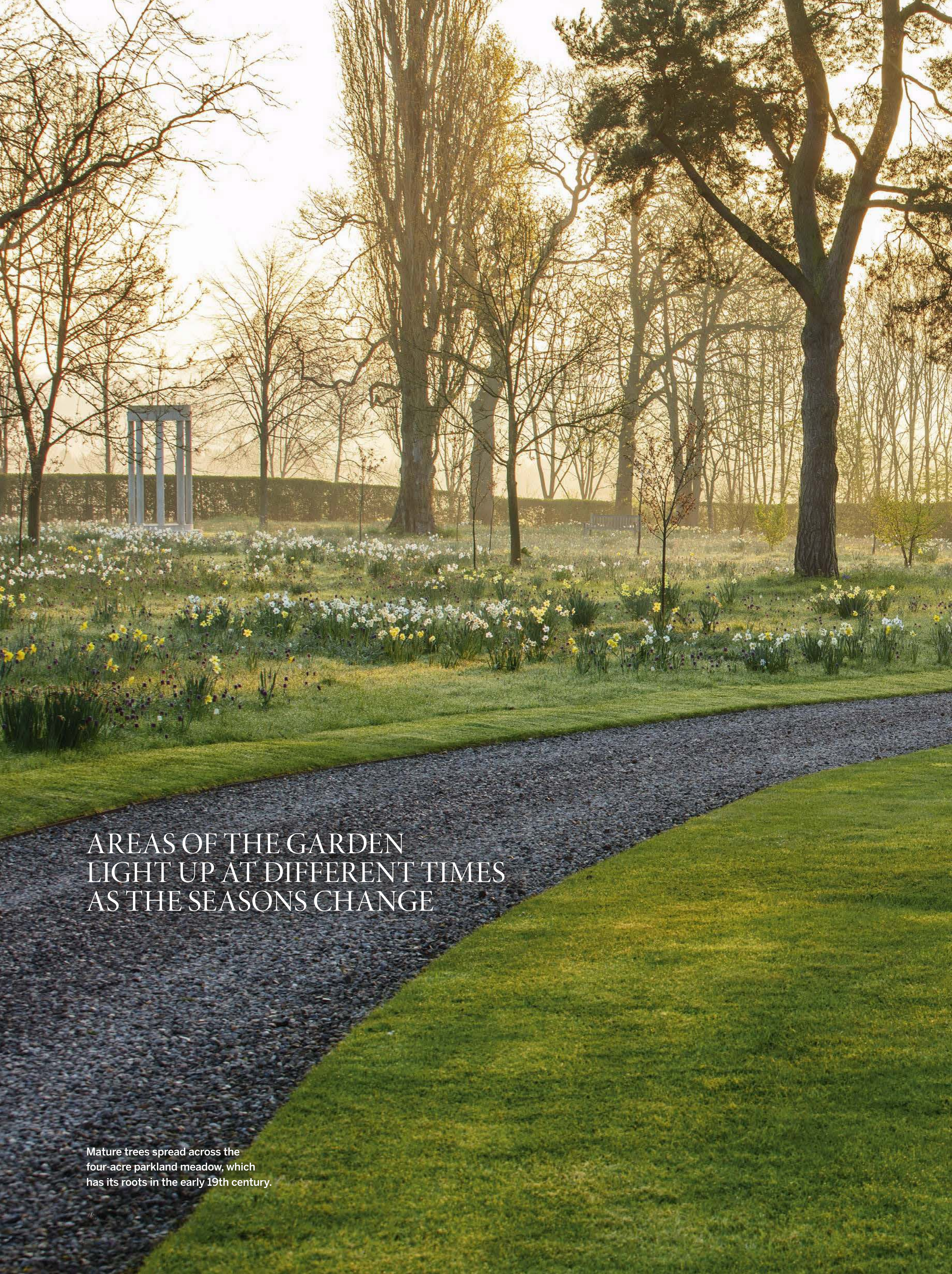
Size Eight-acre gardens and meadow in a 90-acre estate.

Soil Heavy clay with a high water table and natural springs in the meadow.

Climate 250m above sea level, moderate rainfall.

Hardiness zone USDA 8.

On misty mornings, Morton Hall's fritillary meadow takes on an ethereal beauty, emphasised by the monopteros, designed by owner Anne Luetcke's brother-in-law Carl Georg Luetcke.



AREAS OF THE GARDEN LIGHT UP AT DIFFERENT TIMES AS THE SEASONS CHANGE

Mature trees spread across the four-acre parkland meadow, which has its roots in the early 19th century.

As Anne Luetcke and her husband René Olivieri drove up the driveway to first view Morton Hall, they were met with an arresting sight. "I looked to the right and shouted 'Stop!'," says Anne. "There was the beautiful fritillary meadow in full flower. We hadn't even seen the house at this point, but I said 'We're going to buy this house'." The garden's three acres of fritillary meadow were doing their best sales pitch. "It was the sheer expanse of it," says Anne. "I had never seen anything quite like it."

It is this exquisite spring meadow that has driven and shaped Anne's redevelopment of the garden. "The meadow is the jewel. The rest of the garden is built around it." Early on Anne enlisted the help of garden designer Charles Chesshire and their first move was to banish many of the massive laurels that crowded and closed in the gardens and created a claustrophobic feel. Nowadays visitors can take in house and meadow simultaneously as they come up that same driveway, and in fact the whole house and garden has a transparent and airy feel, the house's many windows opening up on to a garden that slips from one area to the next, with wide views to the parkland beyond in one direction, and across the Vale of Evesham in another.

It was Charles who came up with the idea of the 'garden journey'. This is a series of seven spaces around the house, which light up in turn as the seasons change, like a spotlight falling on different areas of a stage set. The only places the laurels have been kept is as tunnels that work as transitions

▷ between some of these areas, and you walk from the house through one of these to reach the first of the spring gardens, the New Garden. As with everything at Morton Hall, it was created to complement the meadow. “I wanted to create an earlier spring garden, but it was not to compete with the meadow or to try to be the meadow.” Clumps of snowdrops and primulas start the year here, with flowering cherries, amelanchiers and four cultivars of species tulip taking over a little later. “It is charming and romantic,” says Anne. A meandering broken belt of *Viburnum tinus* divides the New Garden from the meadow in the most delicate and ethereal way, allowing glimpses through to the star of the show.

It is in March and April that the meadow reaches its peak. When Anne first moved in, the display began in March with *Narcissus lobularis*, moving on to fritillaries in April, which here have a high ratio of white to purple flowers, about 40:60. There was also a collection of further narcissus, including lovely *N. poeticus*. “I just watched the meadow for three years. I was in awe of it and didn’t want to harm it,” says Anne. But as she got to know it better she felt emboldened to start tinkering. Over the past six years, she and her gardeners have introduced blue and white crocuses, including ‘Jeanne d’Arc’, ‘Flower Record’, ‘Prins Claus’ and ‘Pickwick’, to pull the season back into February, as well as many more clumps of *N. poeticus* var. *recurvus* and *N.* ‘Actaea’ to spring up among the fritillaries. Over the past two years, Anne and head gardener Harry Green have made an even bolder move in extending the meadow’s season later into early summer. After the fritillaries faded, the meadow was just a sea of buttercups for the rest of the year, so they took an idea developed at Highgrove and introduced *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii*, *Camassia* ‘Blue Heaven’ and *Allium hollandicum* ‘Purple Sensation’. “Conditions seem to be right for them and they are naturalising here. They look wonderful,” says Anne. A monopteros – a columnar structure open to the sky and designed by Anne’s Berlin-based architect brother-in-law Carl Georg Luetcke – provides formal and unchanging contrast to the ethereal and ever-changing display around it.

At the base of the meadow, the level drops down into the first of two woodland spring gardens, a Japanese stroll garden, designed around a watery stepping-stone crossing and a tea house, and planted up with magnolias, camellias, white and blue *Anemone blanda*, and masses of scillas. Via an impressive woodland rockery, it leads to more formal and later-flowering areas of the garden, but revels in spring itself. It was the meadow that brought Anne here, and as well as enhancing and perfecting it, she has created surrounding gardens that manage to flatter and complement but never distract from it. In the process, she has made this spectacle even more magical than it was when she first stumbled across it. □

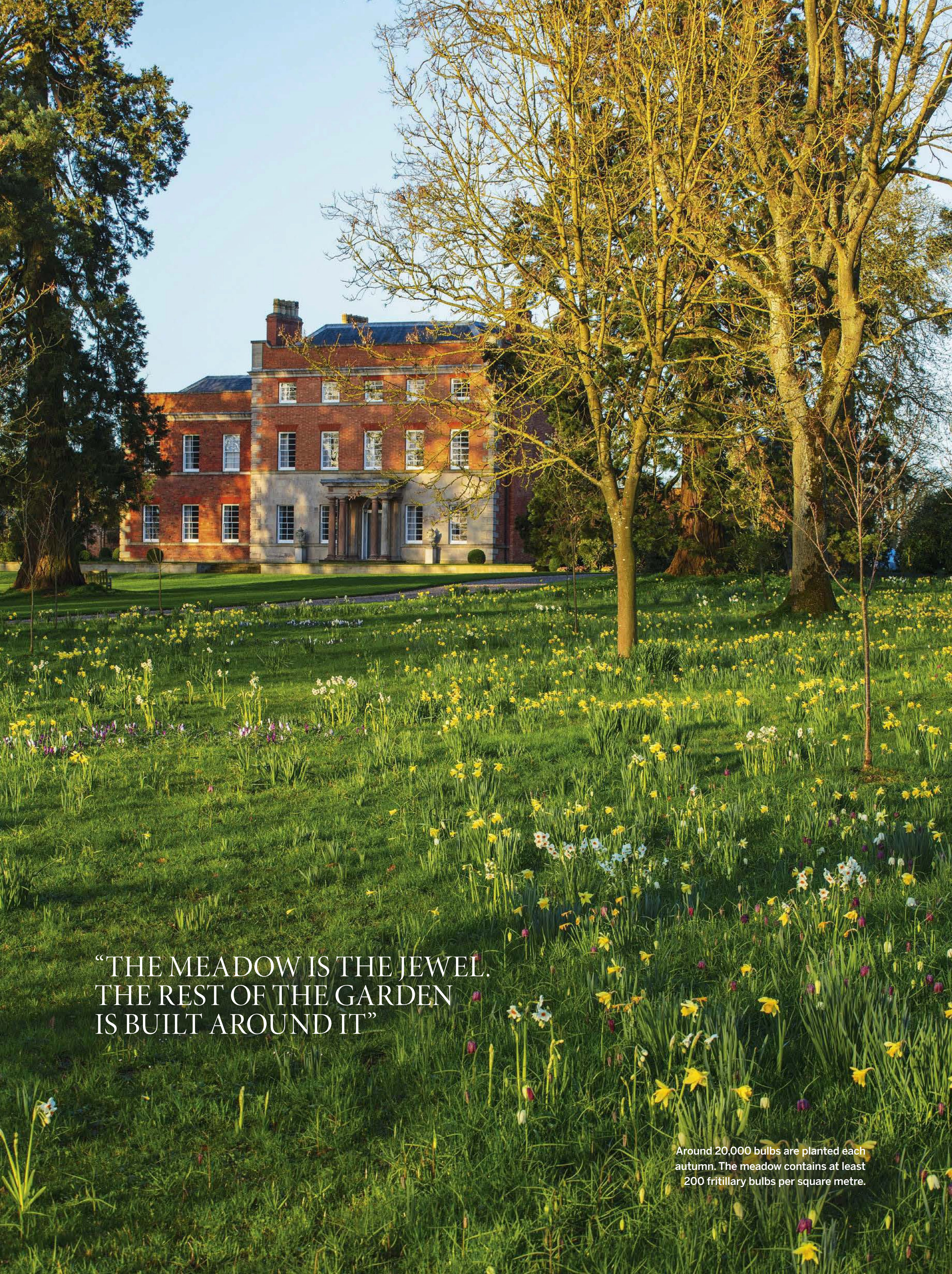
USEFUL INFORMATION

Address Morton Hall Gardens, Morton Hall Lane, Redditch, Worcestershire B96 6SJ. **Tel** 01386 791820. **Website** mortonhallgardens.co.uk **Open** For the NGS on 21 April and 1 September, and for the RSC on 30 June and 11 August, 10am-4pm, £7 per adult, children free. The garden is open to groups at other times by appointment. Visit the website for further information.

MANAGING A FRITILLARY MEADOW

The fritillary thrives in the garden’s damp soil, which floods most winters. But Anne has carefully managed and enhanced the area during her time here.

~ The fritillaries are allowed to go to seed in late spring, and the meadow is cut in June. The growth is left to lie, so that the seeds disperse, and is then removed as hay.
~ A second cut is made at the end of September, and the growth again removed. This helps to keep soil fertility low, allows for easier autumn bulb planting, and also ensures that the grass is short come spring to show off the fritillaries when they are in flower.
~ At Morton Hall approximately 20,000 bulbs are planted each year throughout the spring gardens, to improve the show and extend the season.
~ Each type of bulb has its own planting method. The fritillaries are planted in clumps of 15 beneath a lifted flap of turf.
~ Chilli powder is considered the best squirrel deterrent. Each bulb or clump of bulbs is dusted with the powder once it is in the ground.



“THE MEADOW IS THE JEWEL. THE REST OF THE GARDEN IS BUILT AROUND IT”

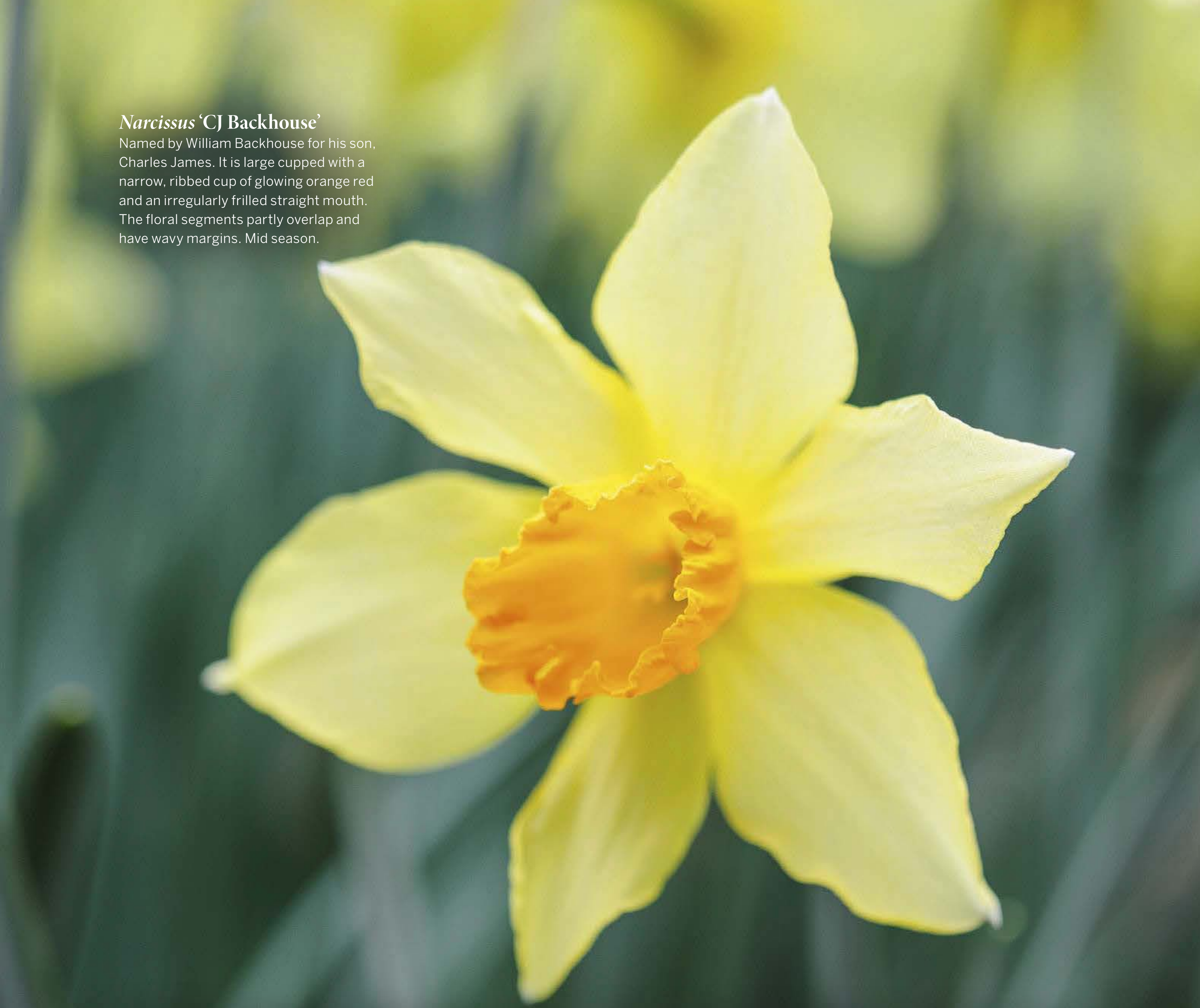
Around 20,000 bulbs are planted each autumn. The meadow contains at least 200 fritillary bulbs per square metre.

FAMILY HISTORY

Tracking down the Backhouse daffodils bred by her ancestors has become a lifetime's work for Caroline Thomson

WORDS **MATTHEW BIGGS** PHOTOGRAPHS **JASON INGRAM**

In her garden in Fife Caroline Thomson and her husband Andrew have planted out more than 15,000 daffodils and hold the National Collection of Backhouse cultivars.



***Narcissus* 'CJ Backhouse'**
Named by William Backhouse for his son, Charles James. It is large cupped with a narrow, ribbed cup of glowing orange red and an irregularly frilled straight mouth. The floral segments partly overlap and have wavy margins. Mid season.

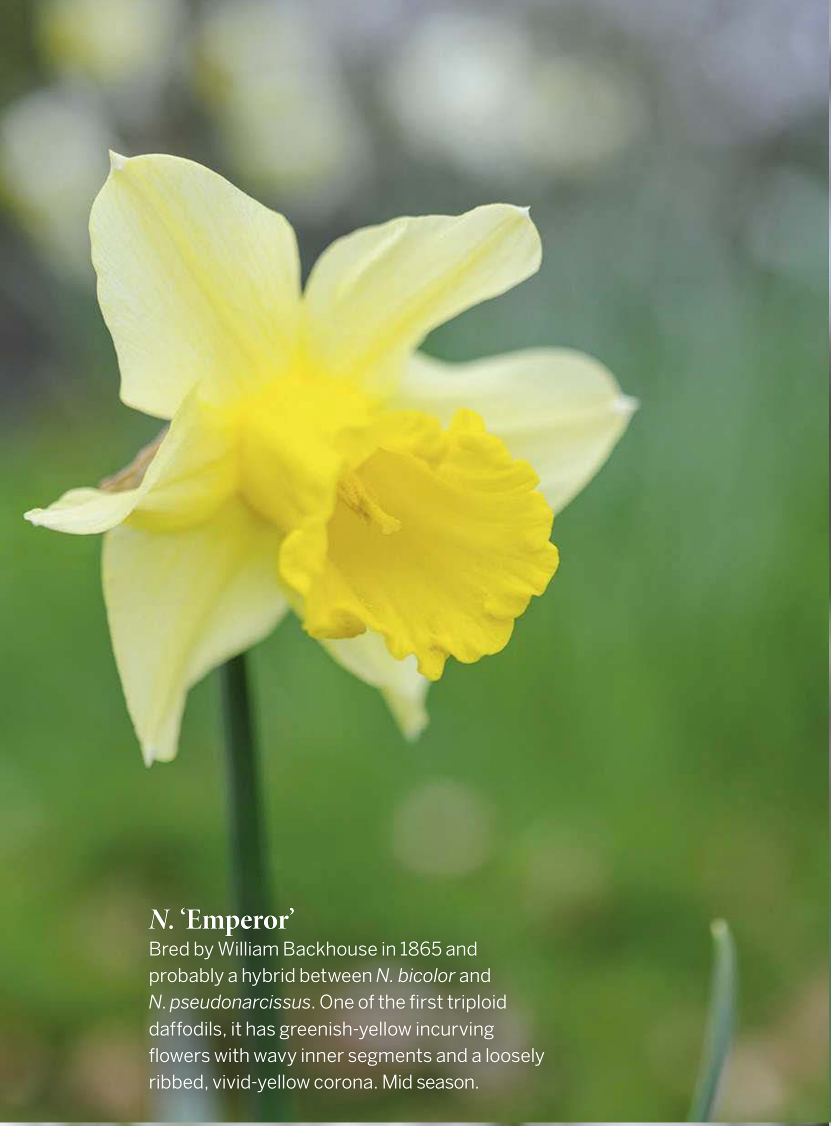
Twelve years ago, my mother said, 'someone in the family needs to collect Backhouse bulbs and plants, and record their history before they are lost forever'," says Caroline Thomson, founder of the Backhouse Heritage Exhibition & Education Centre based at her home in Fife. "At the time I didn't realise that this would become a lifetime's work for myself and my husband Andrew."

Caroline's mother is Lady Georgina Buchan-Hepburn, a direct descendant of the Quaker Backhouse family, and the plants in need of collecting that have taken over Caroline's life are the famous Backhouse daffodils bred by three generations of Backhouses, starting with William Backhouse (1807-1869).

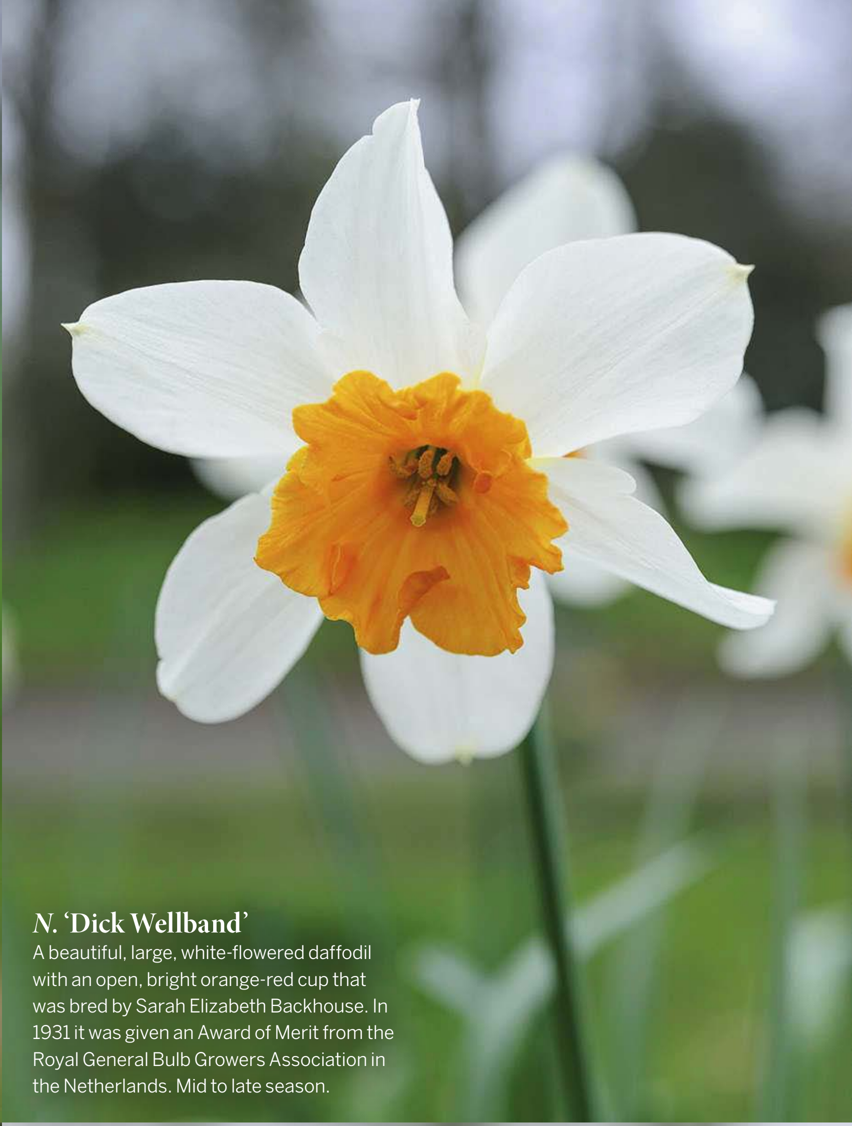
William was a banker from Darlington whose passion for hybridising daffodils revolutionised daffodil breeding. In 1865 he raised two cultivars, 'Emperor' and 'Empress' that were among the first triploid daffodils (with three sets of chromosomes) to be raised in the UK. This higher chromosome count (normal diploid daffodils have two sets: one male; one female), conferred both greater size and vigour and amazed growers. When William's son Henry first showed these daffodils to the editor of *The Gardener's Chronicle* he almost fell off his seat in amazement. But William's greatest achievement came some years later when he raised the UK's first tetraploid daffodil, with four sets of chromosomes. This bi-coloured daffodil boasted an impressive 12.5cm- diameter flower atop a 60cm stem. William died in 1869 before he could see the flower from the final-stage of his hybridisation, but when his son Charles saw the daffodil his father had provisionally called 'Weardale' in full bloom he re-named it 'Weardale Perfection'.

Both Henry and Charles continued their father's hybridising work, with Henry raising several new cultivars, including the white 'Niveth', but it was their younger brother Robert Ormston who is most closely associated with the Backhouse cultivars. With his wife, Sarah Elizabeth Dodgson, Robert was responsible for breeding around 57 daffodils, including 'Backhouse's Giant', 'Lune De Miel' and the beautiful double 'Glowing Phoenix' – as well as the famous Backhouse lilies. Sarah (after whom the pink daffodil 'Mrs RO Backhouse' is named) was an outstanding hybridiser in her own right, and a keen breeder of everything from colchicums and hyacinths to Siamese cats, but she is best remembered for raising red-cupped cultivars. When one of these cultivars, 'Dick Wellband', was launched in New York in 1921 it was displayed in a shop window against a black, velvet drape. "Starlets appeared in the same way to advertise their movies," says Caroline. "I believe the daffodil drew larger crowds." Sarah's fame was secured when she won an RHS Bronze Floral Medal in 1905 for a Group of Daffodils and the Daffodil

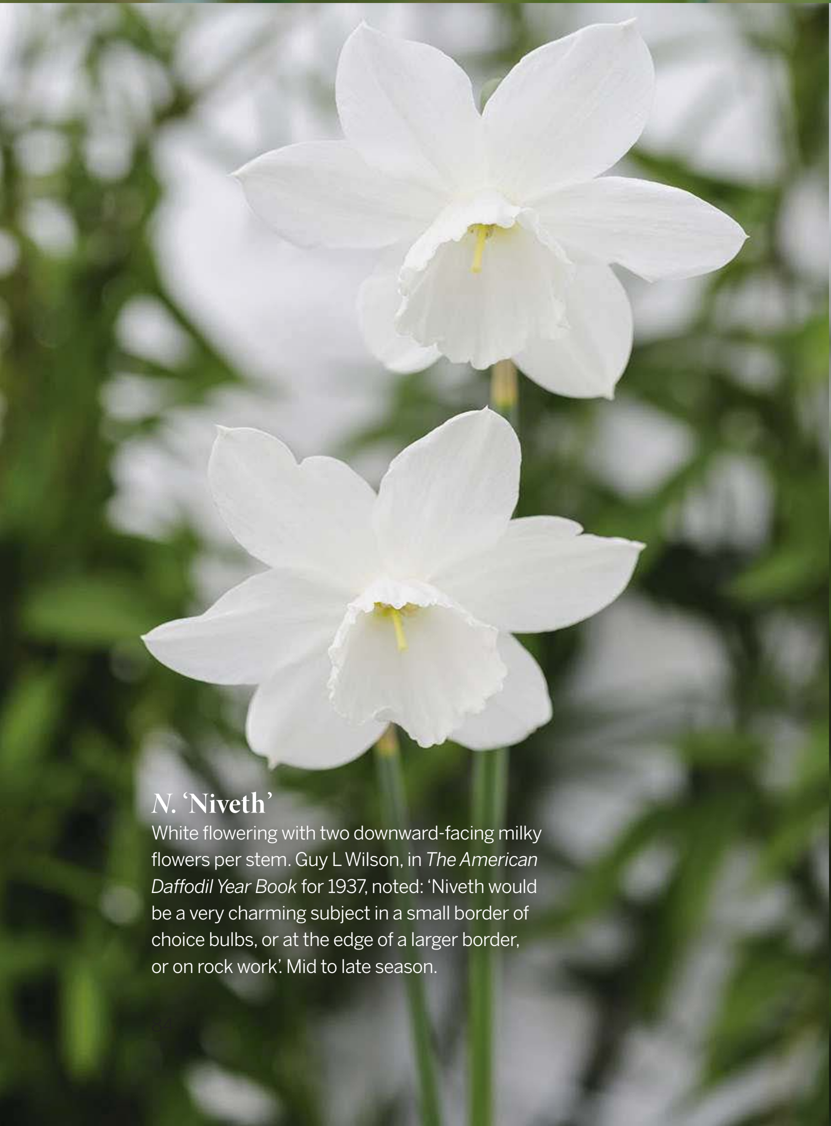
▷



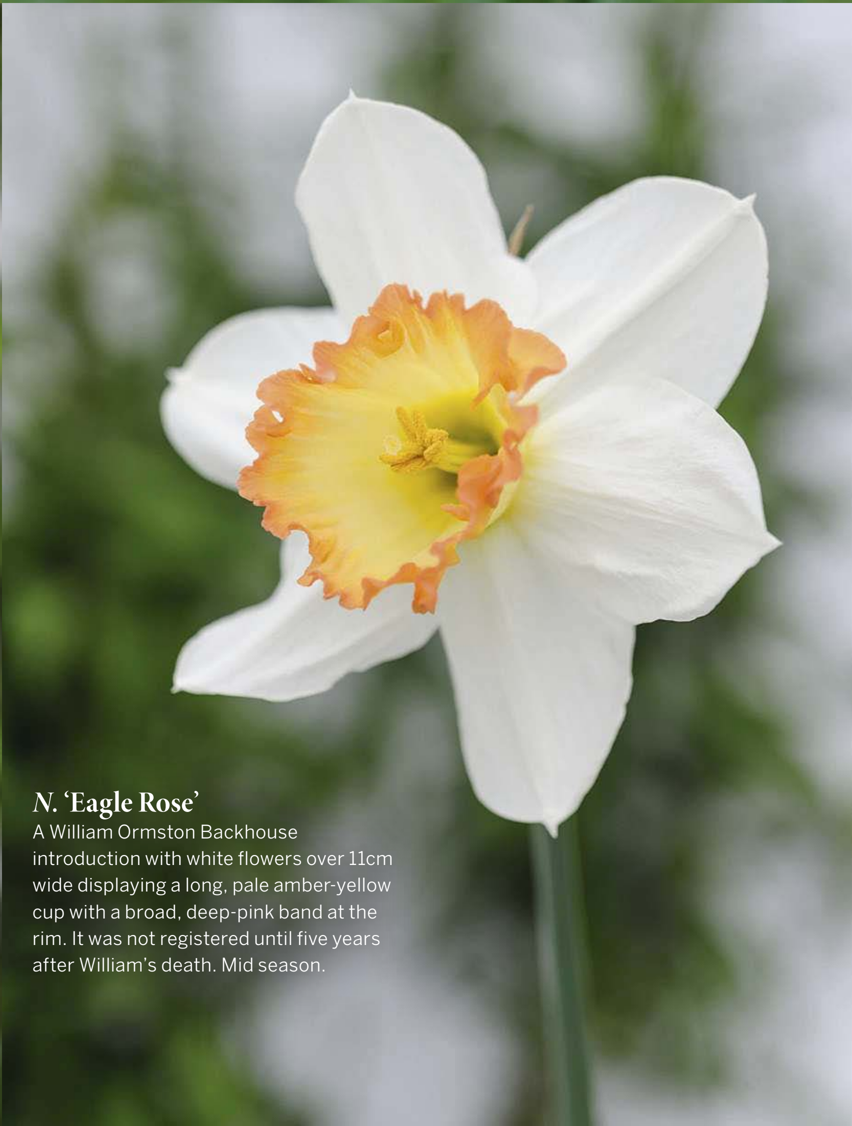
***N.* 'Emperor'**
Bred by William Backhouse in 1865 and probably a hybrid between *N. bicolor* and *N. pseudonarcissus*. One of the first triploid daffodils, it has greenish-yellow incurving flowers with wavy inner segments and a loosely ribbed, vivid-yellow corona. Mid season.



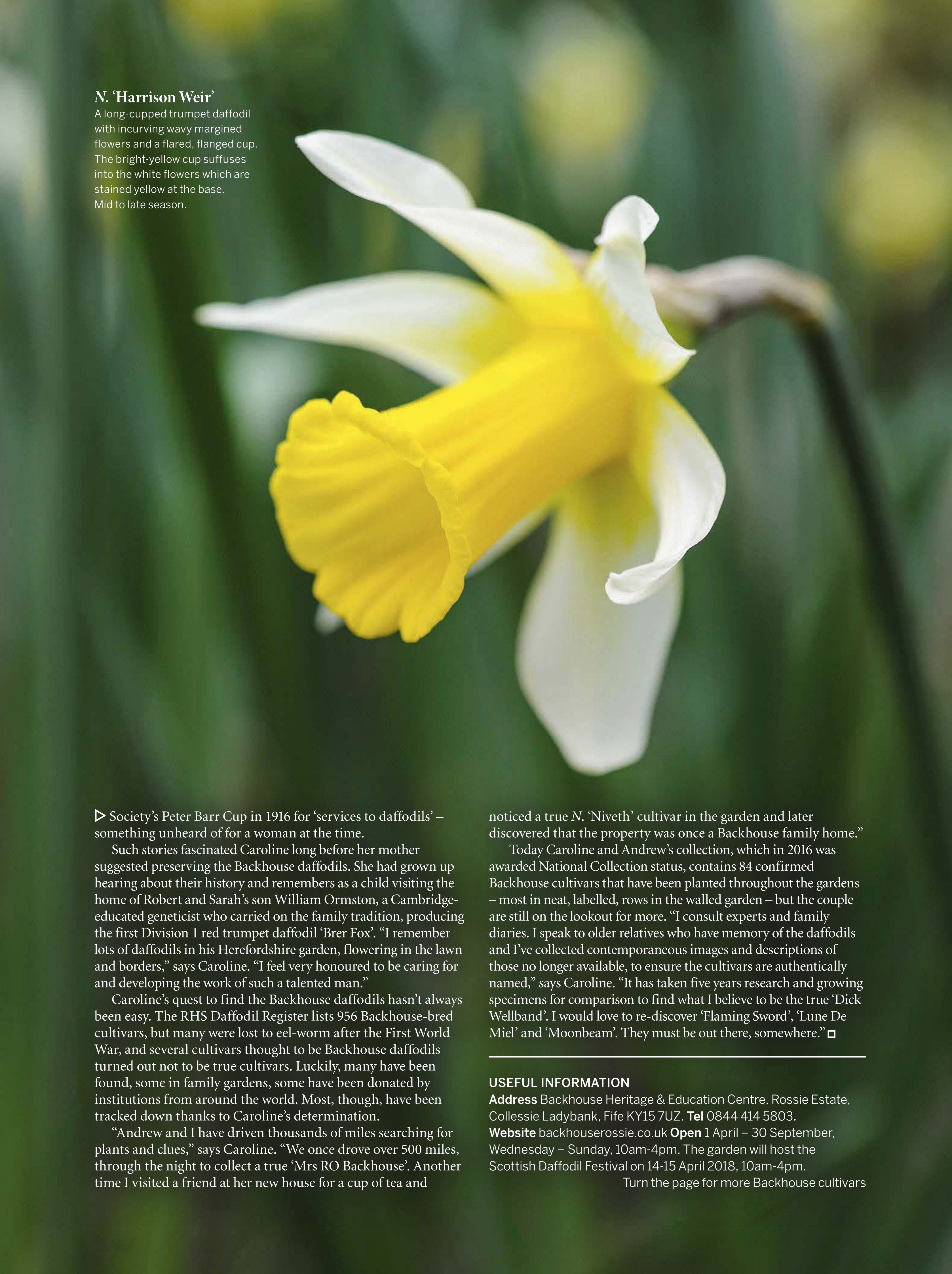
***N.* 'Dick Wellband'**
A beautiful, large, white-flowered daffodil with an open, bright orange-red cup that was bred by Sarah Elizabeth Backhouse. In 1931 it was given an Award of Merit from the Royal General Bulb Growers Association in the Netherlands. Mid to late season.



***N.* 'Niveth'**
White flowering with two downward-facing milky flowers per stem. Guy L Wilson, in *The American Daffodil Year Book* for 1937, noted: 'Niveth would be a very charming subject in a small border of choice bulbs, or at the edge of a larger border, or on rock work'. Mid to late season.



***N.* 'Eagle Rose'**
A William Ormston Backhouse introduction with white flowers over 11cm wide displaying a long, pale amber-yellow cup with a broad, deep-pink band at the rim. It was not registered until five years after William's death. Mid season.



N. **'Harrison Weir'**
A long-cupped trumpet daffodil with incurving wavy margined flowers and a flared, flanged cup. The bright-yellow cup suffuses into the white flowers which are stained yellow at the base. Mid to late season.

▷ Society's Peter Barr Cup in 1916 for 'services to daffodils' – something unheard of for a woman at the time.

Such stories fascinated Caroline long before her mother suggested preserving the Backhouse daffodils. She had grown up hearing about their history and remembers as a child visiting the home of Robert and Sarah's son William Ormston, a Cambridge-educated geneticist who carried on the family tradition, producing the first Division 1 red trumpet daffodil 'Brer Fox'. "I remember lots of daffodils in his Herefordshire garden, flowering in the lawn and borders," says Caroline. "I feel very honoured to be caring for and developing the work of such a talented man."

Caroline's quest to find the Backhouse daffodils hasn't always been easy. The RHS Daffodil Register lists 956 Backhouse-bred cultivars, but many were lost to eel-worm after the First World War, and several cultivars thought to be Backhouse daffodils turned out not to be true cultivars. Luckily, many have been found, some in family gardens, some have been donated by institutions from around the world. Most, though, have been tracked down thanks to Caroline's determination.

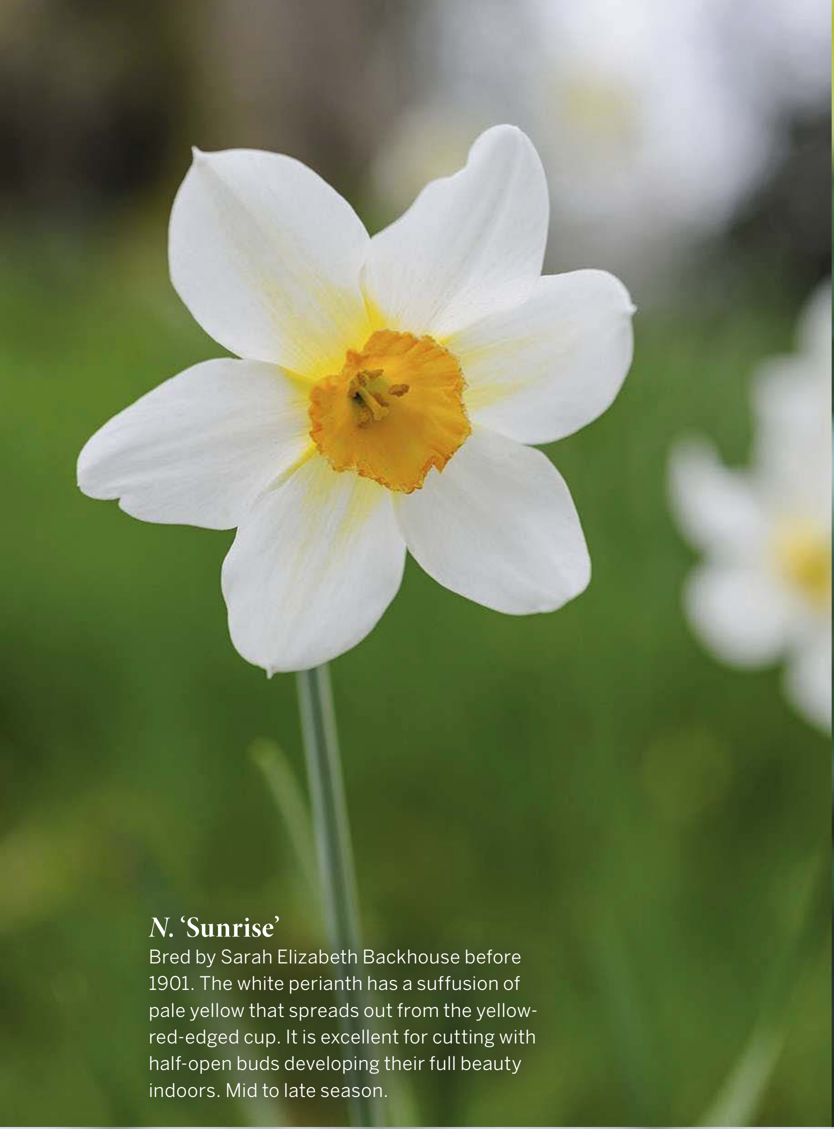
"Andrew and I have driven thousands of miles searching for plants and clues," says Caroline. "We once drove over 500 miles, through the night to collect a true 'Mrs RO Backhouse'. Another time I visited a friend at her new house for a cup of tea and noticed a true *N.* 'Niveth' cultivar in the garden and later discovered that the property was once a Backhouse family home."

Today Caroline and Andrew's collection, which in 2016 was awarded National Collection status, contains 84 confirmed Backhouse cultivars that have been planted throughout the gardens – most in neat, labelled, rows in the walled garden – but the couple are still on the lookout for more. "I consult experts and family diaries. I speak to older relatives who have memory of the daffodils and I've collected contemporaneous images and descriptions of those no longer available, to ensure the cultivars are authentically named," says Caroline. "It has taken five years research and growing specimens for comparison to find what I believe to be the true 'Dick Wellband'. I would love to re-discover 'Flaming Sword', 'Lune De Miel' and 'Moonbeam'. They must be out there, somewhere." ◻

USEFUL INFORMATION

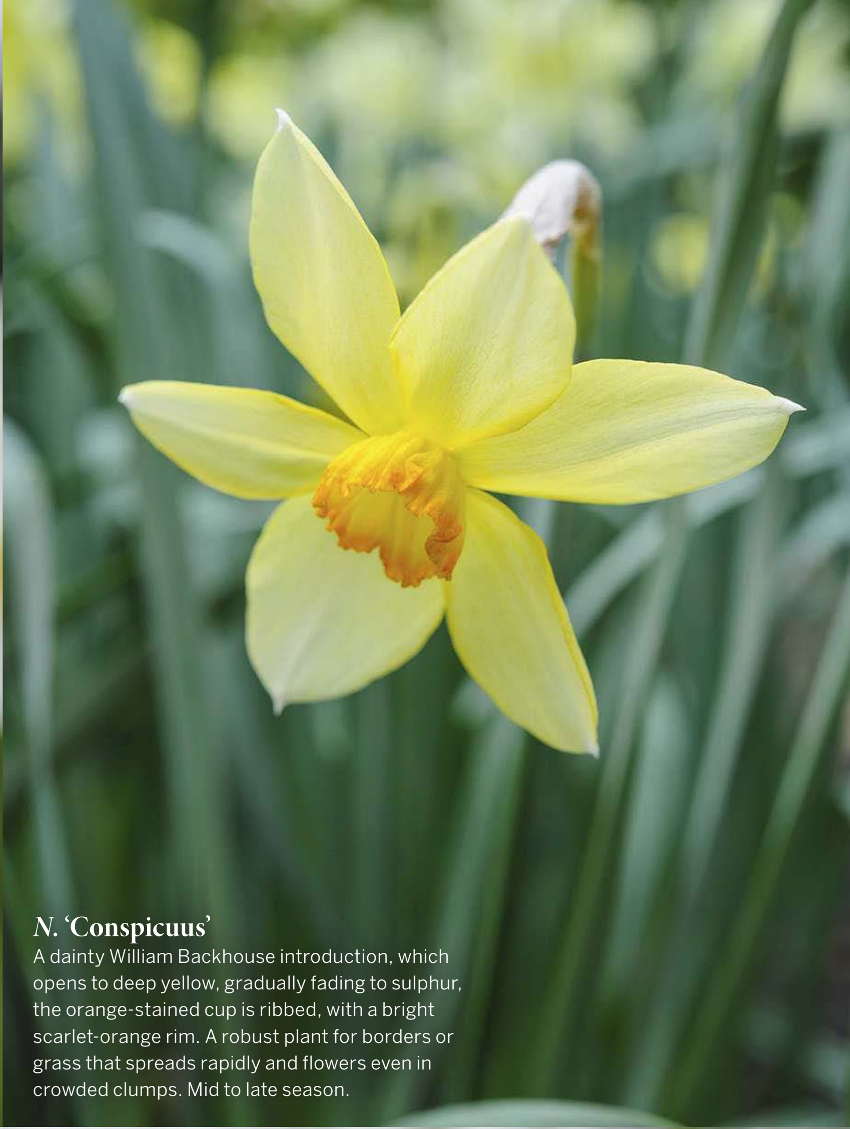
Address Backhouse Heritage & Education Centre, Rossie Estate, Collessie Ladybank, Fife KY15 7UZ. **Tel** 0844 414 5803. **Website** backhouserossie.co.uk **Open** 1 April – 30 September, Wednesday – Sunday, 10am-4pm. The garden will host the Scottish Daffodil Festival on 14-15 April 2018, 10am-4pm.

Turn the page for more Backhouse cultivars



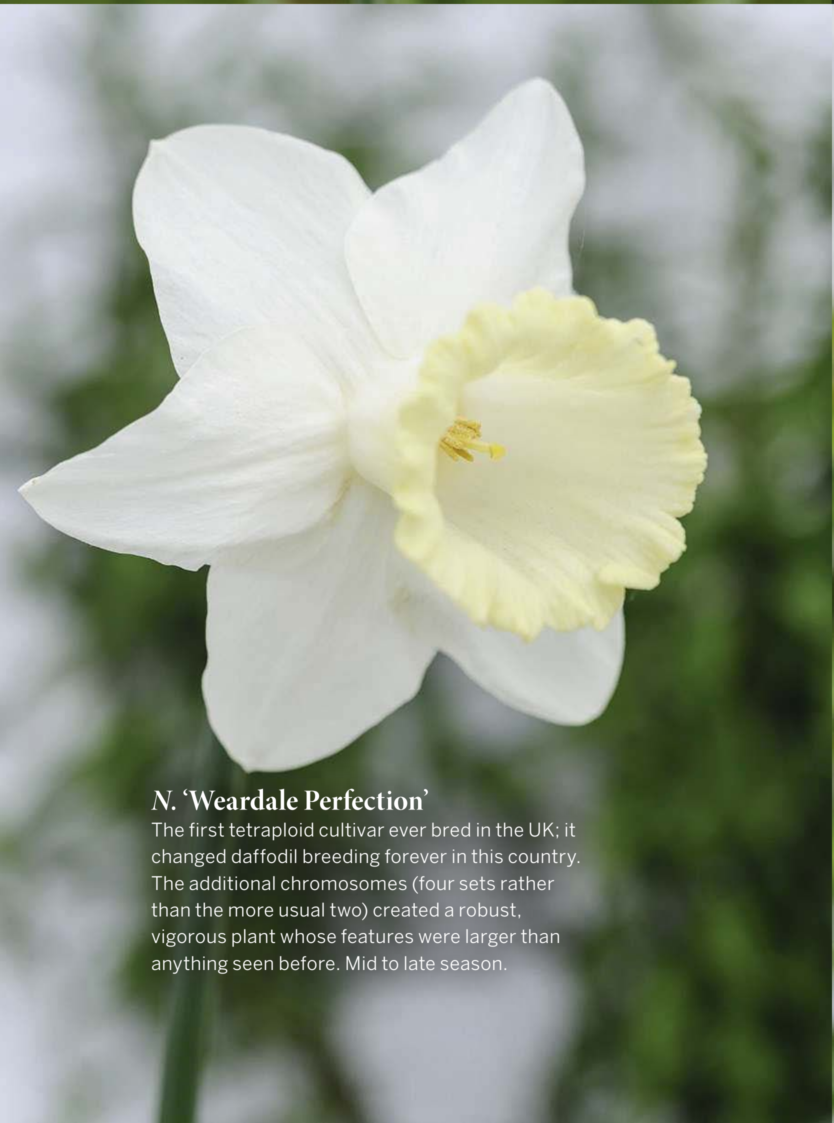
N. 'Sunrise'

Bred by Sarah Elizabeth Backhouse before 1901. The white perianth has a suffusion of pale yellow that spreads out from the yellow-red-edged cup. It is excellent for cutting with half-open buds developing their full beauty indoors. Mid to late season.



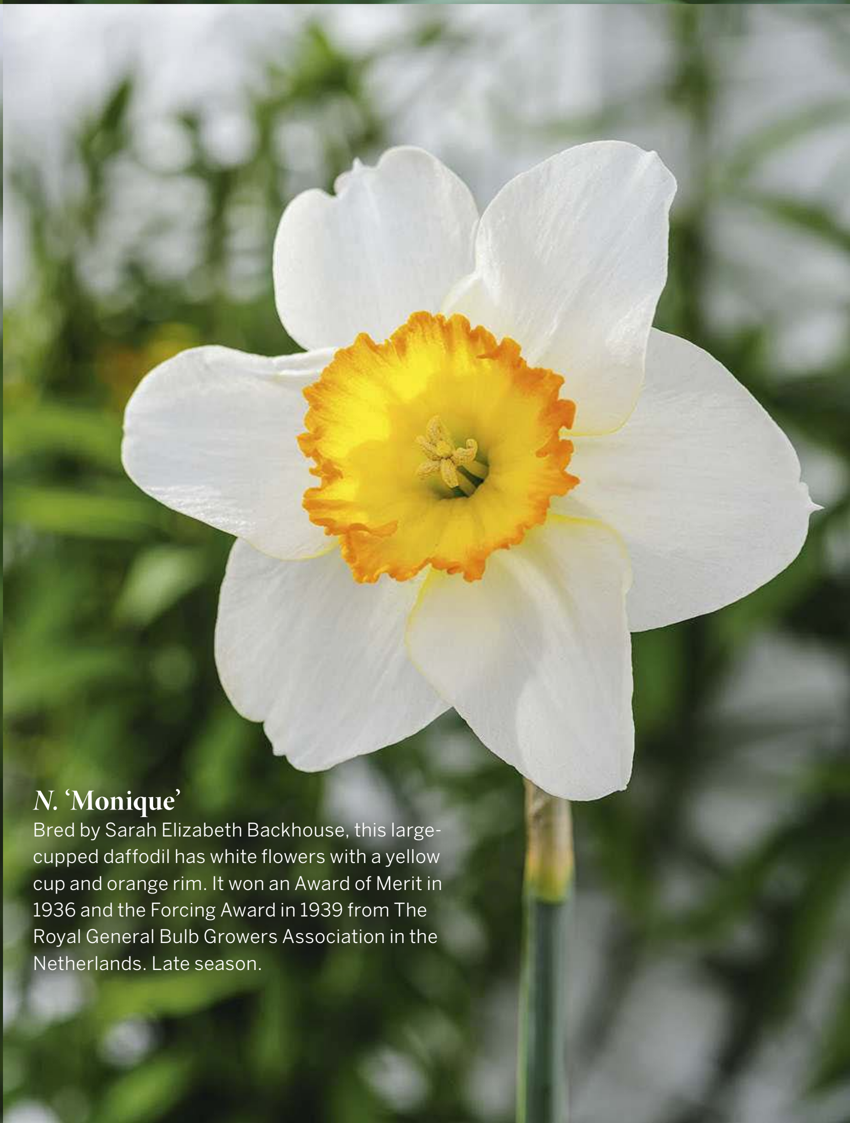
N. 'Conspicuus'

A dainty William Backhouse introduction, which opens to deep yellow, gradually fading to sulphur, the orange-stained cup is ribbed, with a bright scarlet-orange rim. A robust plant for borders or grass that spreads rapidly and flowers even in crowded clumps. Mid to late season.



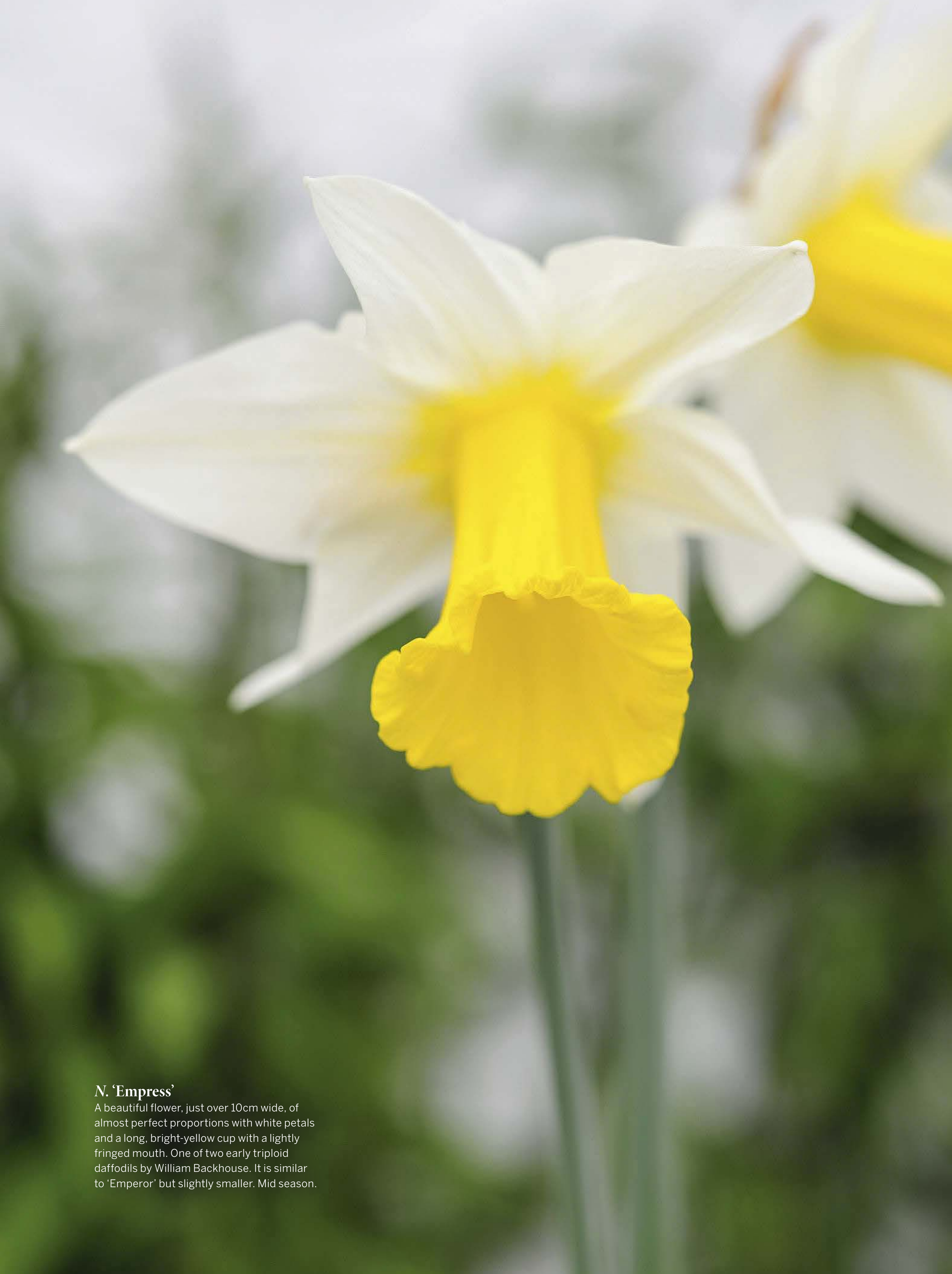
N. 'Weardale Perfection'

The first tetraploid cultivar ever bred in the UK; it changed daffodil breeding forever in this country. The additional chromosomes (four sets rather than the more usual two) created a robust, vigorous plant whose features were larger than anything seen before. Mid to late season.



N. 'Monique'

Bred by Sarah Elizabeth Backhouse, this large-cupped daffodil has white flowers with a yellow cup and orange rim. It won an Award of Merit in 1936 and the Forcing Award in 1939 from The Royal General Bulb Growers Association in the Netherlands. Late season.



N. 'Empress'

A beautiful flower, just over 10cm wide, of almost perfect proportions with white petals and a long, bright-yellow cup with a lightly fringed mouth. One of two early triploid daffodils by William Backhouse. It is similar to 'Emperor' but slightly smaller. Mid season.

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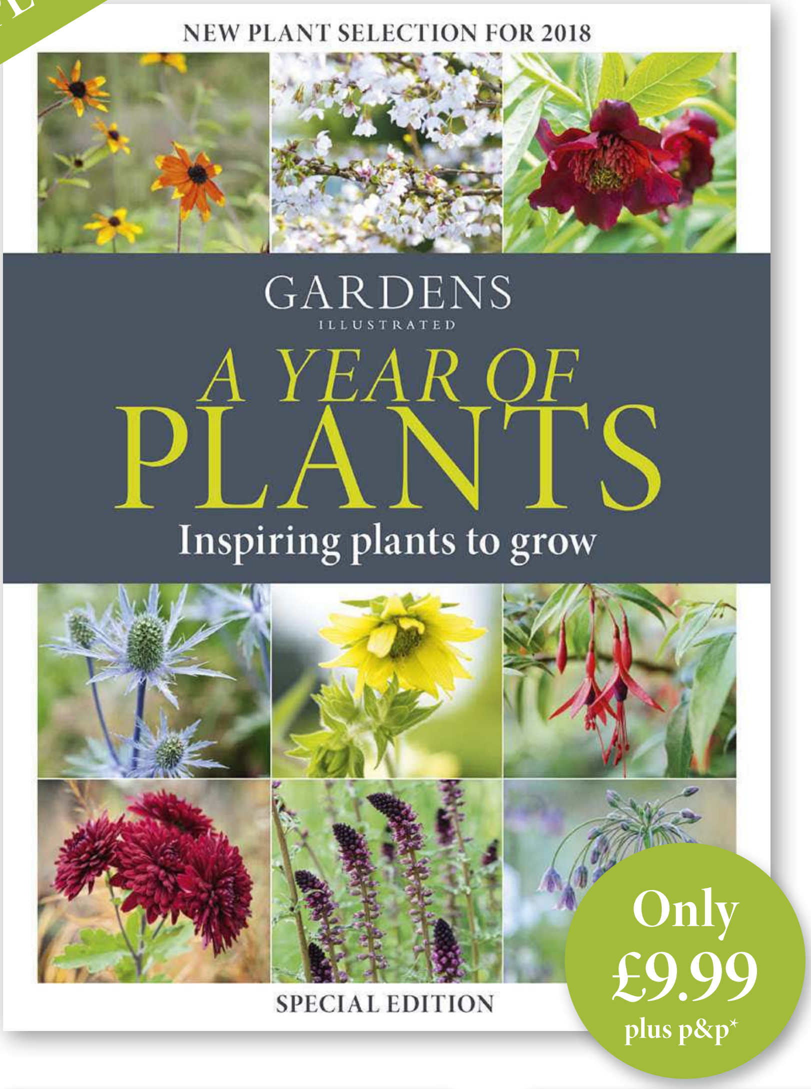

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Contributors include Dan Person, Fergus Garrett, Bob Brown, Marina Christopher, Derry Watkins and Mat Reese, who together offer a comprehensive guide to the plants they could not garden without.

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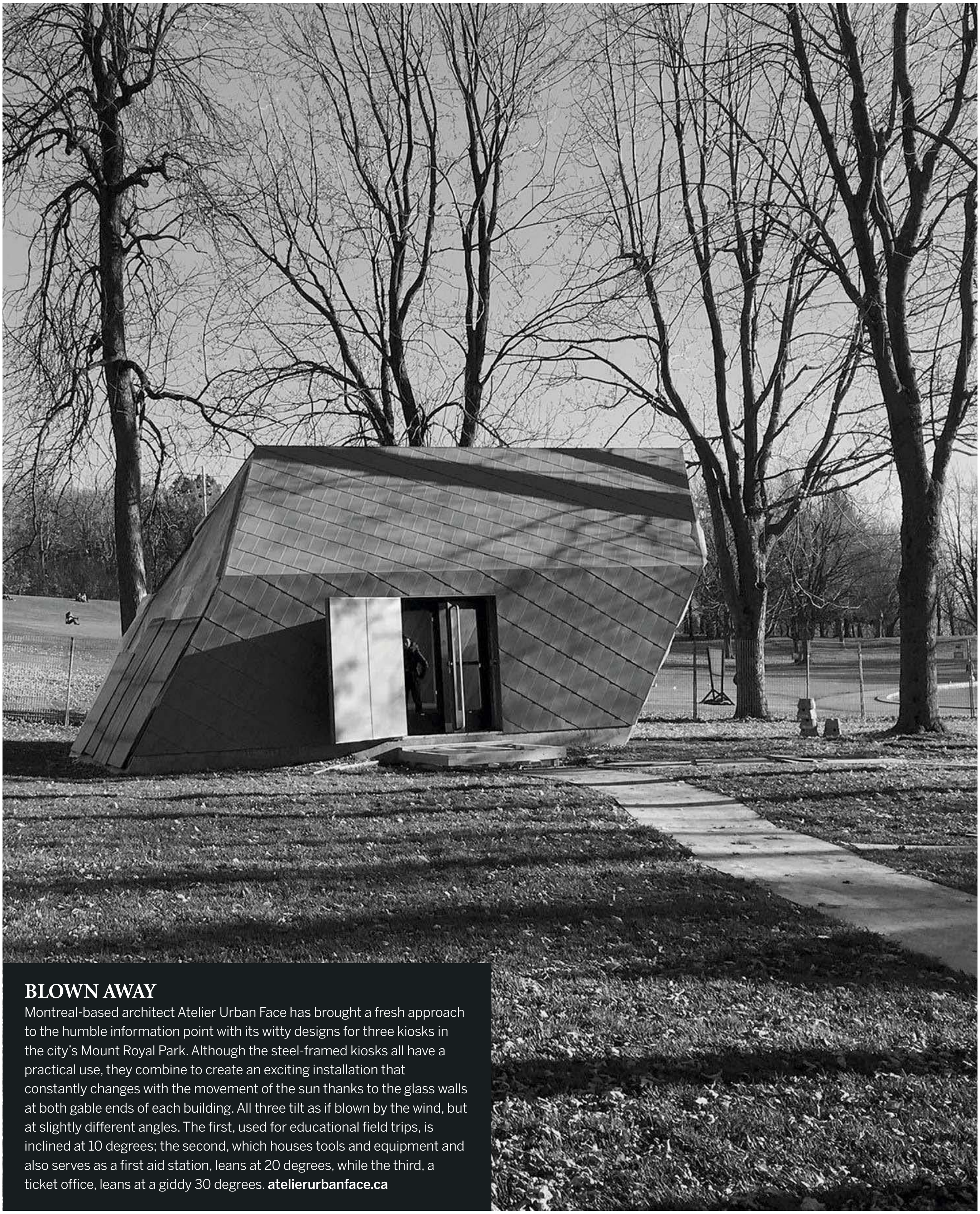
DESIGN

News, ideas and sourcebook



BLOWN AWAY

Montreal-based architect Atelier Urban Face has brought a fresh approach to the humble information point with its witty designs for three kiosks in the city's Mount Royal Park. Although the steel-framed kiosks all have a practical use, they combine to create an exciting installation that constantly changes with the movement of the sun thanks to the glass walls at both gable ends of each building. All three tilt as if blown by the wind, but at slightly different angles. The first, used for educational field trips, is inclined at 10 degrees; the second, which houses tools and equipment and also serves as a first aid station, leans at 20 degrees, while the third, a ticket office, leans at a giddy 30 degrees. **atelierurbanface.ca**

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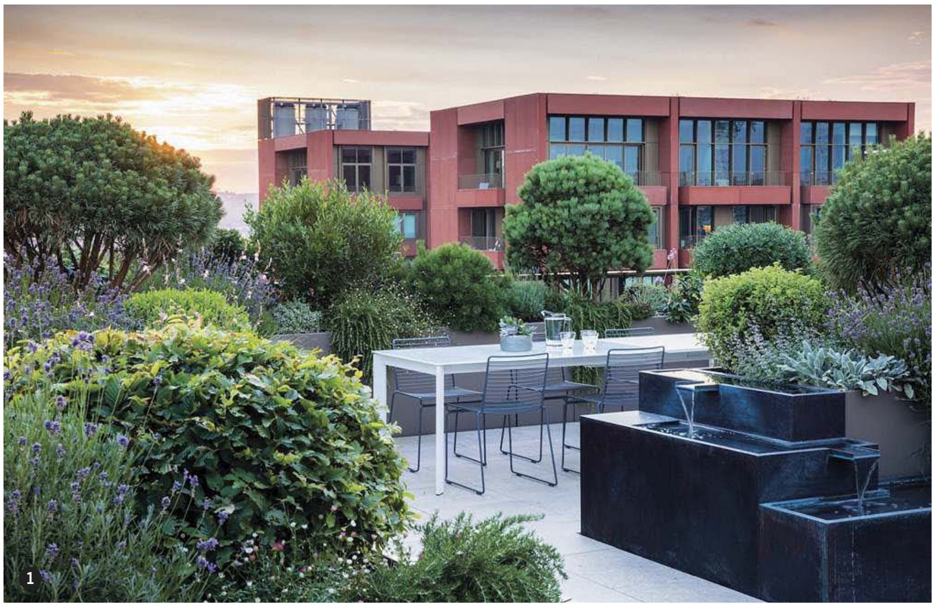
DESIGN

NEWS

COMPILED BY **ANNIE GATTI**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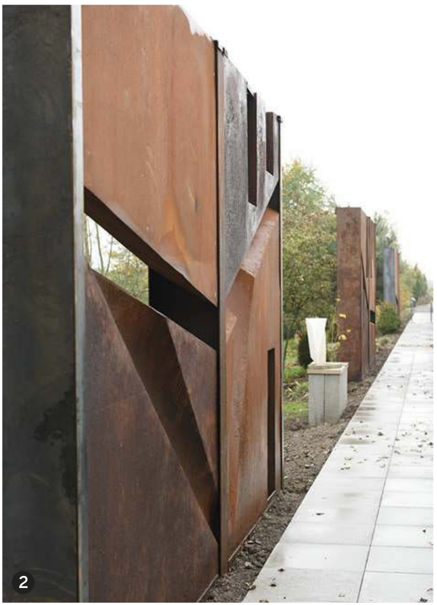
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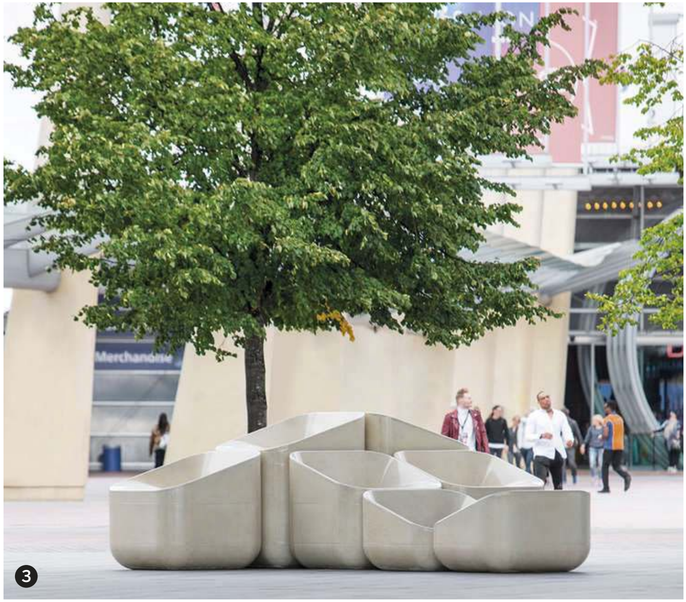
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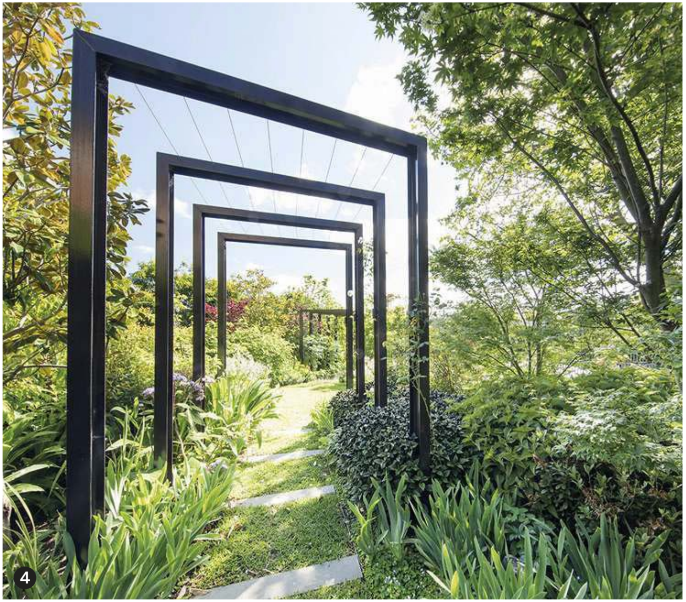
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① AWARD-WINNING ROOF GARDEN

A generously planted, layered garden designed by Emily Erlam has won Best Roof Garden in the Society of Garden Designers 2017 awards. Erlam's design for the 170 square metre space on the 13th floor of an apartment block in London's King's Cross uses a series of custom-made planters, in galvanised steel to create three separate areas. On one side of the garden, a tiered water feature, in aged bronze, follows the line of the planting that takes inspiration from the hummocky profiles of arid landscapes. Low-growing pines, *Pinus mugo* and *Pinus sylvestris* 'Watereri', provide evergreen interest. **sgd.org.uk**

② PASSING LIGHT

Ann-Margreth Bohl's Corten steel wall sculpture, *Passing Light*, which formed a stunning backdrop to Paul Hervey-Brookes' Best in Show IQ Quarry Garden at last year's RHS Chatsworth Show, has been reconfigured as three, 3m-high sculptures for the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. A crack runs through each piece casting shadows that change throughout the day and evoke the extraction process of quarrying. Their new home at the arboretum, in a garden based on the Chatsworth show garden, is on the site of an old quarry where natural seeding will be encouraged to mimic how quarries create their own plant communities. **thenma.org.uk**

③ ART OF CONCRETE

Concrete can be both cosy and intimate, according to Yael Mer and Shay Alkalay, the Raw Edges design duo who were commissioned by NOW Gallery to create a cluster of concrete armchairs, each one large enough to hold two people. The chairs now sit outside the gallery in London's Peninsula Square. The chairs were made by MASS Concrete, manufacturers of bespoke concrete surfaces, and provide a choice of seating at different heights, to perch on or sink into. With the largest weighing in at 1.5 tons, they're designed to stay put.

raw-edges.com
mass-concrete.com

④ AUSTRALIAN GARDEN AWARD

A richly textured garden designed by Australian landscape architect TCL has won an Award of Excellence for best garden landscape in the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects awards. The private garden, for a modernist home in one of Melbourne's most prestigious suburbs, is approached through a screen of silver birches that cast shadows on to the concrete façade of the house. At the rear of the property, pathways meander through a series of stylish arbours and a lush mix of trees, shrubs, perennials and groundcover plants with contrasting textures, tones and colours. **aila.org.au/awards**

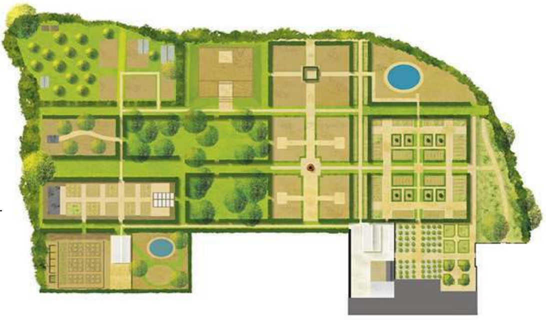
RICHARD BLOOM, INSTITUTE OF QUARRYING, MARC WILMOT, JOHN GOLLINGS

BBC
Gardeners' World magazine
March issue on sale 22nd February

Don't miss the bumper March issue of *BBC Gardeners' World Magazine*

BBC2's *Gardeners' World* returns to our screens on 9 March. Get the lowdown on the new series in the March issue – our TV special with exclusive cover and pages dedicated to the programme, including interviews with the presenters and a plan of Longmeadow.

IMAGES: MARSHA ARNOLD; SCOTT JESSOP (LONGMEADOW PLAN)



Longmeadow garden plan in this issue

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- Houseplants for every room – your complete style guide
- Get your lawn summer-ready with five key tasks
- Attract wildlife to any size of garden
- Win a Danube river cruise from Viking, worth £6,000

Sylvia strikes back

Medical Secretary gives something back to research and treatment

Sylvia's friends remembered her for her kind heart, and her strong desire to help others. Even though she suffered lifelong poor health, while also caring for her critically ill mother.

But Sylvia did more than put on a brave face: she struck back against illness by working as a medical secretary, and following medical advances keenly. That's how she found out that with conditions such as stroke, the right treatment and back-up can make all the difference when given promptly.

So it's not surprising Sylvia decided that **one of the best things she could do would be to strike back again, by supporting the work of the Stroke Association – and leave us a generous gift in her Will.**

Today, we take time to remember her. Because Sylvia is still playing an important part in helping us create a future free of stroke, and turn around the lives of thousands of stroke survivors each year.

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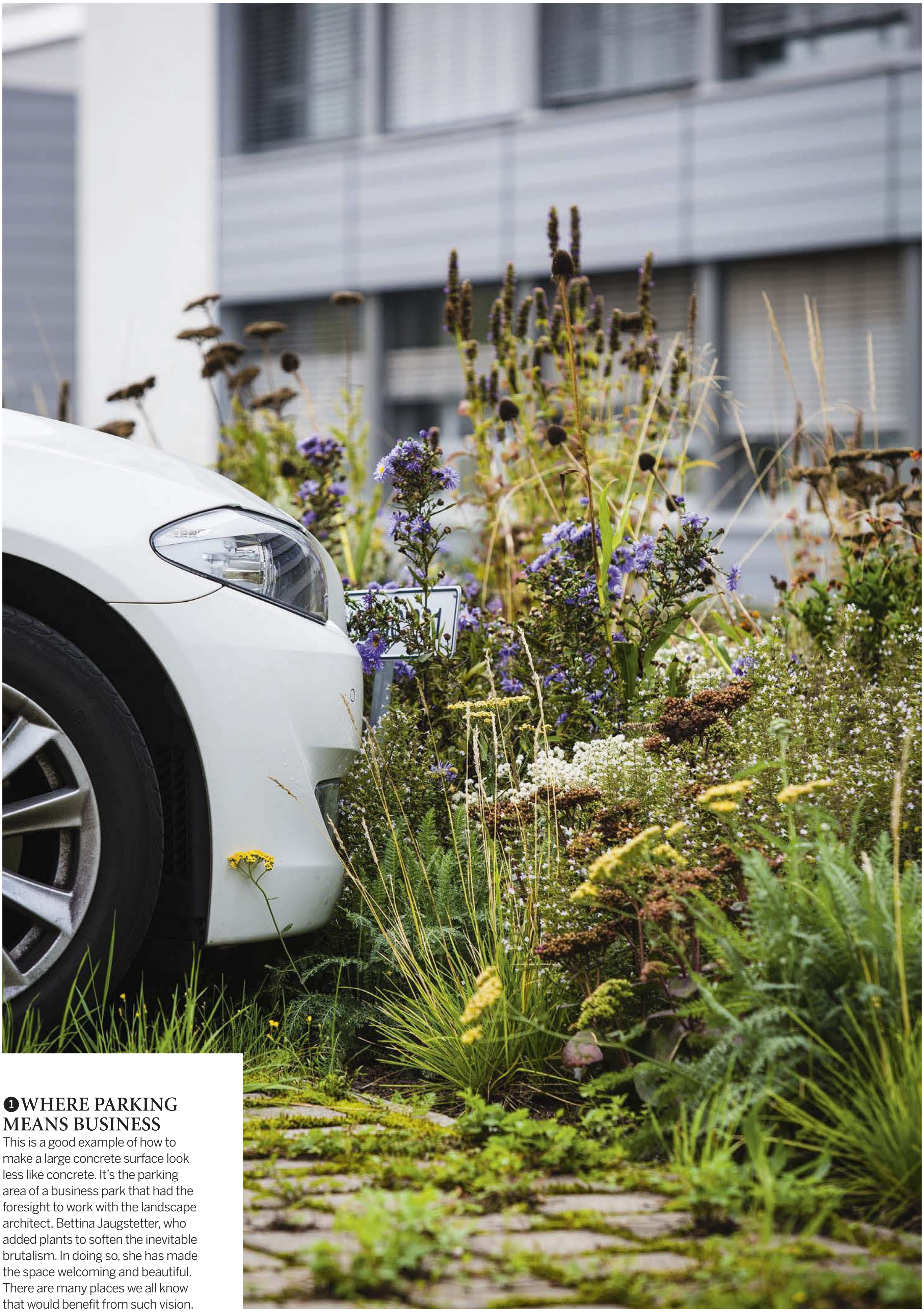

❶ WHERE PARKING MEANS BUSINESS

This is a good example of how to make a large concrete surface look less like concrete. It's the parking area of a business park that had the foresight to work with the landscape architect, Bettina Jaugstetter, who added plants to soften the inevitable brutalism. In doing so, she has made the space welcoming and beautiful. There are many places we all know that would benefit from such vision.

CLAIRE TAKACS

PARKING

Designing a parking space may not be the most glamorous job in the world, but look on it as a way of extending your garden and it takes on a whole new dimension

WORDS JAMES ALEXANDER-SINCLAIR

May I share with you some of the things that annoy me? This is not, I promise, a long list, as I am generally quite a tolerant fellow. I will limit myself to three things: first, large men with small wheelie suitcases (why do they not just pick them up and avoid the ire of all those people whom they trip up?); second, people on trains or planes who hog the entire armrest; and finally, those who park their cars so that they ruin a view. You glance out of the sitting room window expecting your cares to be rinsed away by the cheering sight of the roses in full bloom and instead find yourself looking at the muddy bonnet of a Landrover Discovery. If you're really unlucky, you may even be able to make out a half-empty packet of Haribos or an old Kleenex on the dashboard. People must park, of course, but please, please, please try not to do so in front of the windows.

James Alexander-Sinclair is a garden designer, writer, broadcaster and founder of into-gardens.com. He has served on the RHS Council for the past five years.

This state of affairs cannot be blamed on the guest parker – they are just coming to visit and park wherever seems convenient. It is your fault as resident 'parkee', I'm afraid, or at least the fault of your garden design. Gardens are not just about plant combinations, scent and prettily scattered containers, but also about more practical things, such as drains, bin stores and parking places. Dull, I know, but really important, because if your garden does not actually function, then no matter how numerous or how divine your herbaceous borders they will not make it any better.

I also realise that for most people there is often only one place to park and that is in the front garden. There are countless houses built with neat little front gardens intended for a scattering of plants to welcome visitors and amuse the postman. But one of the conveniences of modern living is the motor car, and front gardens have, in many cases, become prized parking spots away from the interferences of traffic wardens and passing vandals.

This is unsurprising, but the temptation to concrete the whole thing should, ideally, be resisted. In reality, the amount of ground in contact with a stationary car is not much more than a square foot. Think about it – the only things touching the ground are the tyres. Admittedly, they have to get from street to parking spot, but that entails just a couple of narrow tracks. The rest of the area can still be garden or, at the very least, gravel, with plants or scattered containers and the odd climber. This will help alleviate flooding – not overtly, perhaps, but too much impermeable paving puts pressure on drainage systems, which, in turn, empty excess water into the rivers. That can result in people a bit further downstream having to bail out their sitting rooms, rush their soft furnishings upstairs and sit on the roof until they are rescued.

When planning a parking area, you should take into consideration the number of cars that are likely to be in your drive at any one time. Do you have children about to pass their driving tests? Are you endlessly hosting diplomatic receptions or racy dinner parties? Can you get in and out of the car relatively easily? How big is your car? All of these things are important and must be thought through before you start. Also bear in mind that you do not want your guests having to park too far away; nobody wants to run a long way to the front door in the pouring rain while wearing impractical footwear.

Once you have allowed for all these things, you will have the remaining space in which to plant. The planting itself can be useful for steering guests where you want them to be. One of the best parking areas I ever designed contained only four varieties of plant (*Verbascum bombyciferum*, *Panicum virgatum* 'Heavy Metal', *Stipa tenuissima* and *Verbena bonariensis*) placed en masse straight into the gravel outside the house – no extra borders to weed. Nobody will ever knowingly run over a plant, so cars were manipulated gently into the desired parking spots. If space is tight, plant climbers or even low groundcover plants that will live happily beneath a parked car – thymes and scrambling herbs won't mind.

The RHS runs a marvellous campaign called Greening Grey Britain, which encourages people to grow plants wherever possible in towns and cities. Anyone can join in, so pull up a paving stone or dig up a bit of concrete in your front garden – it's better for you, better for wildlife and better for the world. □

NEXT MONTH Design that incorporates landforms.

USEFUL INFORMATION

I would usually use this section to recommend fabulous places for you to visit, but that's a bit tricky when it comes to car parks as opposed to, say, bridges or greenhouses. However, a couple of good examples of attractive parking spring to mind. I'm very fond of the National Trust car park at **Kynance Cove** in Cornwall. It perches on the top of a cliff and you can taste the sea the moment you get out of the car, and if you're lucky you might see red-billed chough skipping around. At the other end of the scale there is the **Sheffield 'cheesegrater'**, a beautiful building housing a multi-storey car park, with an angular steel façade that creates fabulous light patterns.

In terms of books, ***My Garden is a Car Park*** by Kendra Wilson (Laurence King, 2017) is well written, and solves not just the parking conundrum but many others.

The **Greening Grey Britain** pages on the RHS website have lots of advice and ideas for anybody wanting to transform urban and suburban spaces by planting something (rhs.org.uk/get-involved/greening-grey-britain).

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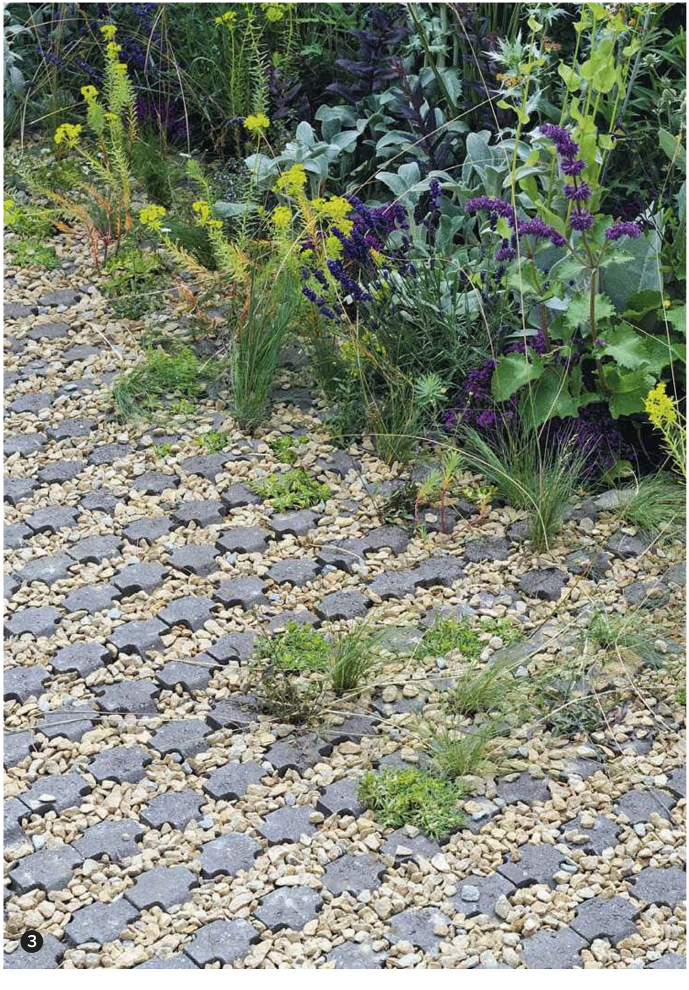

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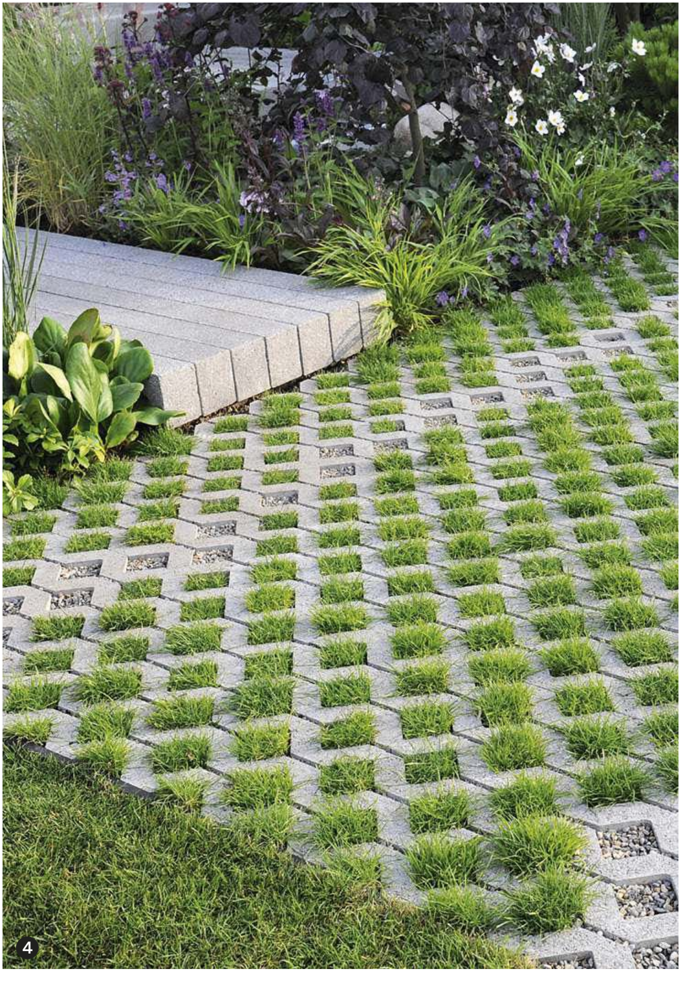

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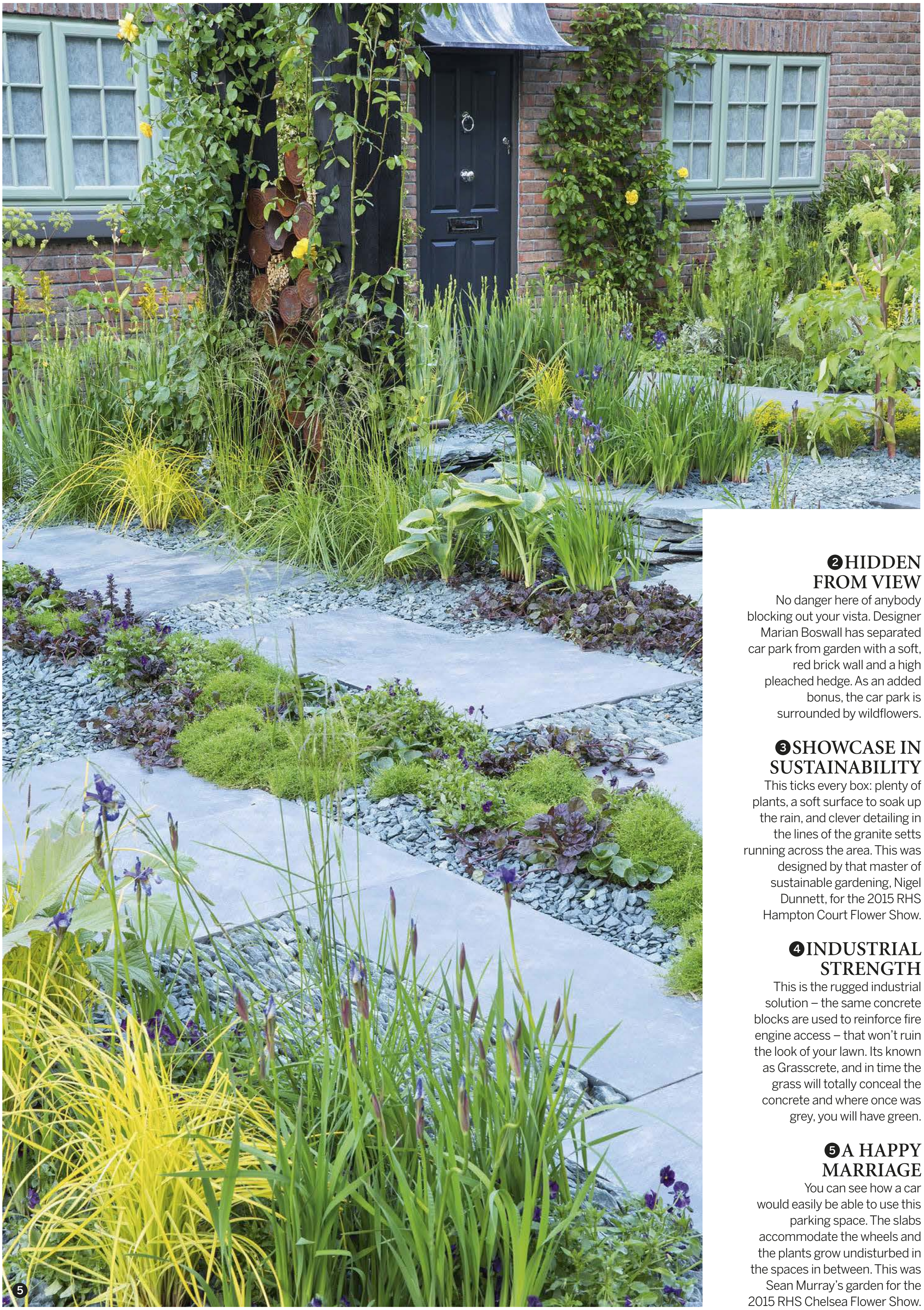
2 MARIANNE MAJERUS GARDEN IMAGES, DESIGN MARIAN BOSWALL; 3 J S SIRA / GAP PHOTOS; 4 FLORA PRESS/UTE KLAPHAKE



5 MARIANNE MAJERUS GARDEN IMAGES, THE GREAT CHELSEA GARDEN CHALLENGE GARDEN, RHS CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW 2015 / DESIGN SEAN MURRAY

❷HIDDEN FROM VIEW

No danger here of anybody blocking out your vista. Designer Marian Boswall has separated car park from garden with a soft, red brick wall and a high pleached hedge. As an added bonus, the car park is surrounded by wildflowers.

❸SHOWCASE IN SUSTAINABILITY

This ticks every box: plenty of plants, a soft surface to soak up the rain, and clever detailing in the lines of the granite setts running across the area. This was designed by that master of sustainable gardening, Nigel Dunnett, for the 2015 RHS Hampton Court Flower Show.

❹INDUSTRIAL STRENGTH

This is the rugged industrial solution – the same concrete blocks are used to reinforce fire engine access – that won't ruin the look of your lawn. Its known as Grasscrete, and in time the grass will totally conceal the concrete and where once was grey, you will have green.

❺A HAPPY MARRIAGE

You can see how a car would easily be able to use this parking space. The slabs accommodate the wheels and the plants grow undisturbed in the spaces in between. This was Sean Murray's garden for the 2015 RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

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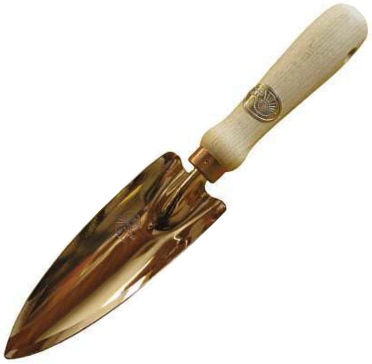

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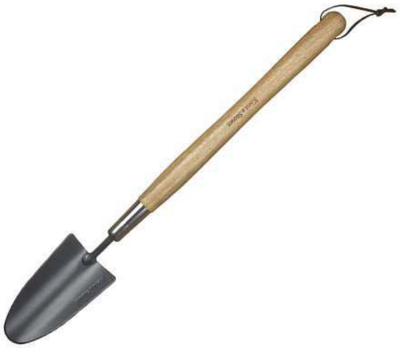

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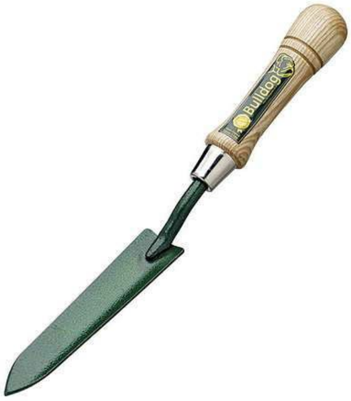

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£7.95, Bulldog Garden Tools,
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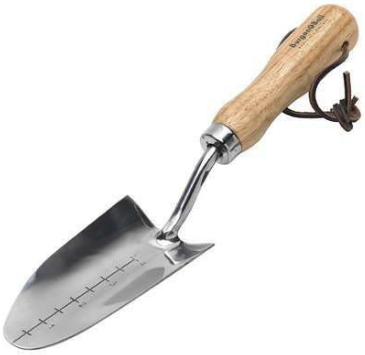

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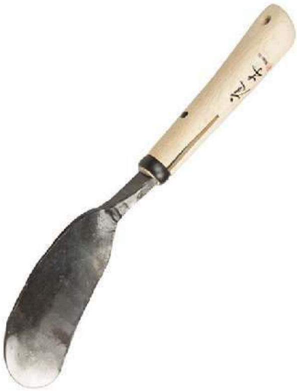

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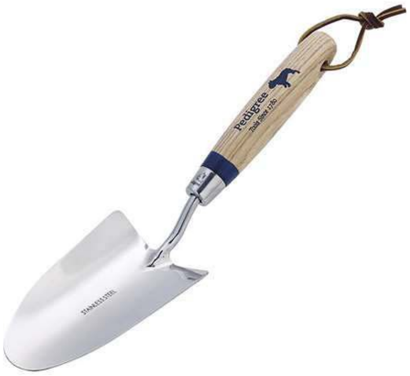

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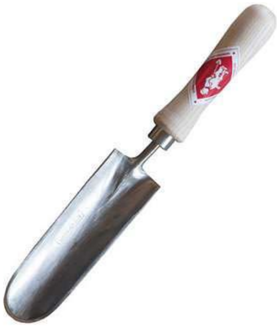

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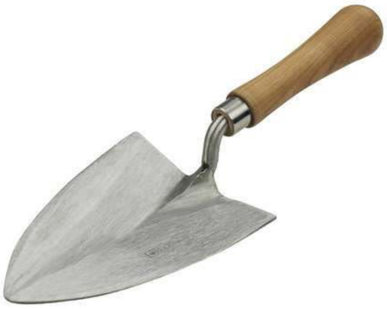

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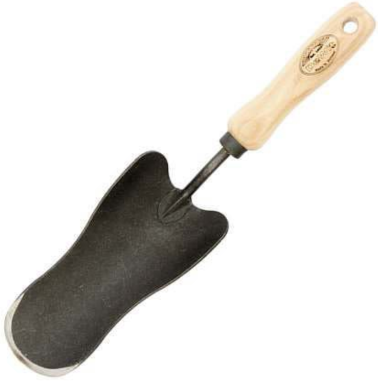

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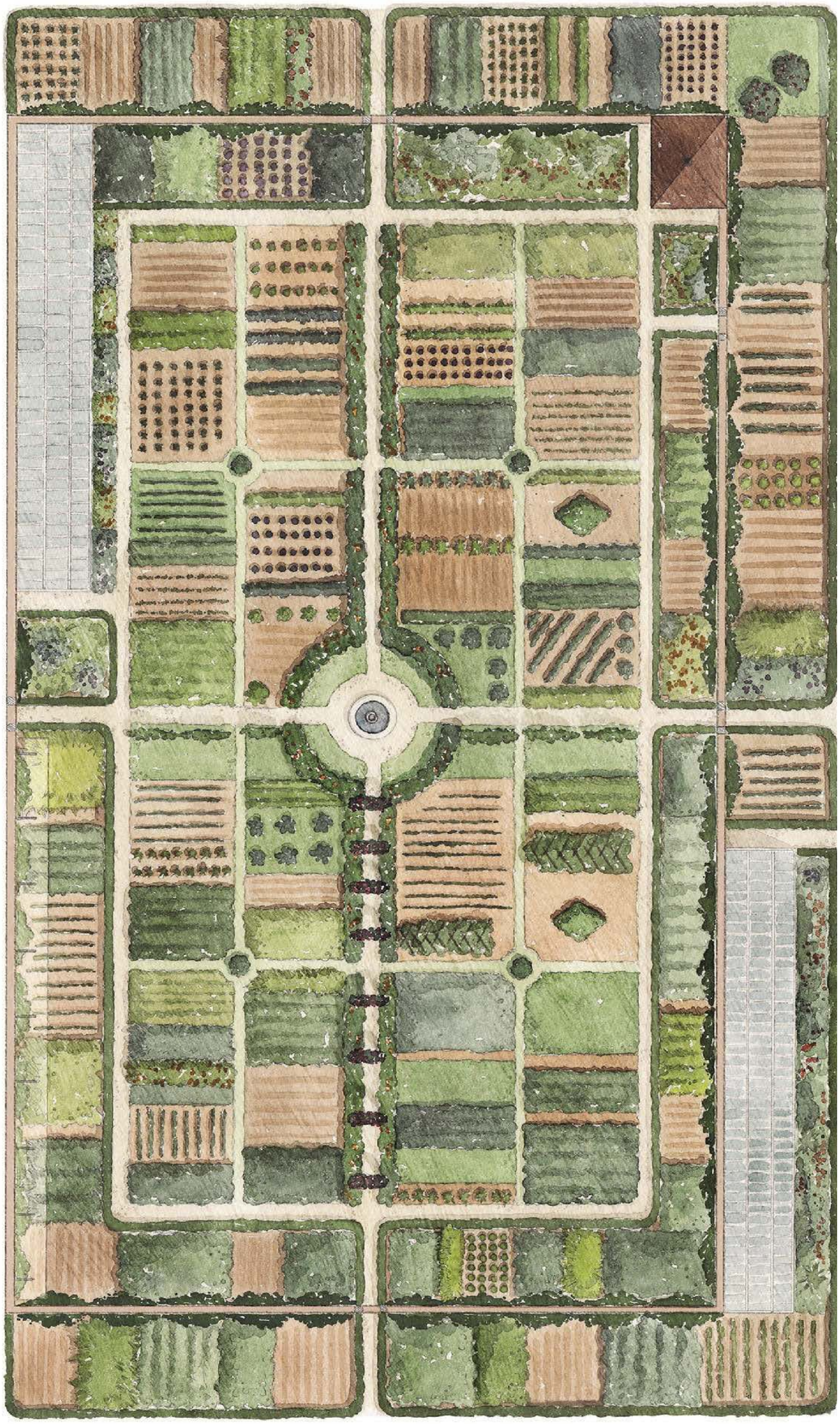

The conventions of walled kitchen gardens – as shown in this illustration by Julie Lammers – are examined in *Walled Gardens* by Jules Hudson, reviewed on page 103.

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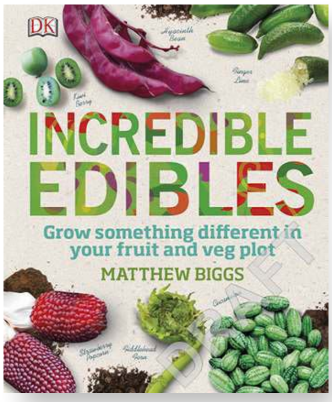
BOOK REVIEWS



INCREDIBLE EDIBLES: GROW SOMETHING DIFFERENT IN YOUR FRUIT AND VEG PLOT

by Matthew Biggs
Dorling Kindersley, £14.99

ISBN 978-0241302101

An inspiring seed-to-plate guide to cultivating more than 50 out-of-the-ordinary fruits and vegetables from goji berries to cucamelon.

Reviewer Mark Diacono is a writer, grower and cook.

Incredible Edibles is an invitation to look beyond the familiar fruit, vegetables and herbs and try something deliciously different. The main book is split into seven chapters, organised by food type, such as Salad Vegetables, Herbs and Spices, with early pages devoted to tips and techniques and guidance about choosing what to grow.

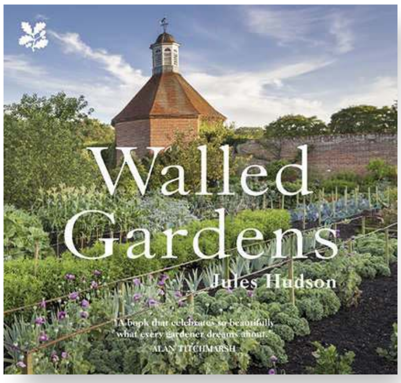
As someone who has grown more than his share of unusual edibles, I can certainly vouch for the interest in the selection of plants – everything from chickpeas and honeyberries – and recipes ranging from callaloo to strawberry popcorn.

Author, Matthew Biggs, is a hugely knowledgeable and respected horticulturist, and his practical wisdom and expertise flow through the pages; this is not a book that will leave you struggling to know what to do and when to do it.

Incredible Edibles is well produced, a hardback with a busy yet clear design that ensures you can always quickly find what you want to know. A Quick Guide tells you the headline information, sowing and harvesting tables show you what to do when, and there are tips for getting the best from each crop in the kitchen. The consistent structure ensures information is clear, even when there is a lot of it.

Illustrated throughout, the photographs give you an idea of not only what the plant will look like, but also take you through steps from sowing and planting, to aftercare and harvesting.

This is a book that would appeal to any gardener looking to extend the range of edible plants they grow through the year, and the thoroughness of information ensures it is as suitable for the enthusiastic newcomer as much as for the experienced allotmenter. It's also incredibly good value.



WALLED GARDENS

by Jules Hudson
National Trust, £16.99

ISBN 978-1909881969

Exploring the foundations that underpin the fantasy of some of the UK's most beautiful – and most beautifully maintained – walled gardens.

Reviewer Jodie Jones is a garden writer.

There is something magical about the concept of a walled garden. Is it the benign microclimate that coaxes tender treasures to perform, or the physical link with generations of gardeners whose skilled labour produced a rich, deep soil that any allotmenteer would covet, or just that childlike sense of entering a secret world hidden from outsiders?

Archaeologist and historian Jules Hudson is primarily beguiled by the walls themselves and what they reveal about the evolution of horticultural and social history. In *Walled Gardens* he sets out to explain how anyone can enjoy these stories once they learn to read the language of bricks, mortar and crumbling ironwork.

'In being able to distinguish a mushroom house from a fruit store, or an expensive brick wall from an earlier stone one,' he writes. 'We can begin to chart the pattern of investment in a garden. In so doing we gain insight into how the garden was valued by those who owned, built and subsequently maintained it.'

From 15th-century gardens built adjoining the main house, with low walls simply intended to keep animals off the crops, to elaborate Victorian creations complete with hot-water heating systems and vast glasshouses protecting an array of tender plants collected from around the Empire, Hudson charts the development of these amazing spaces. And in so doing he explains the 18th-century craze for growing pineapples in the heat of rotting manure, how the walls built by Winston Churchill in his garden at Chartwell reveal 'a man who simply loved having a go, regardless of expertise', and how 21st-century gardeners are reinventing the walled garden concept to suit the economic realities of life today.

BOOK REVIEWS

Brilliant & Wild
A GARDEN FROM SCRATCH IN A YEAR
LUCY BELLAMY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON INGRAM

BRILLIANT & WILD: A GARDEN FROM SCRATCH IN A YEAR

by Lucy Bellamy
Photographs by Jason Ingram
Pimpernel Press, £20

ISBN 978-1910258637

An inspiring guide that shows those new to gardening how to create a beautiful, new perennial garden in a small space.

Reviewer Alice Vincent is a gardening journalist for The Telegraph.

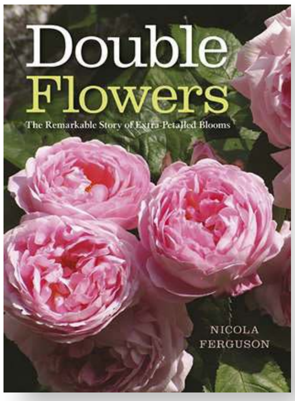
Beginner gardeners blessed with gardens rarely know where to start. But Lucy Bellamy's *Brilliant & Wild* promises a magical thing: a garden from scratch in a year, with barely any maintenance or horticultural knowledge necessary.

It could sound too good to be true. But Bellamy, like Dutch landscape gardener Piet Oudolf, has selected a handsome variety of hardy perennials that will flourish without taking over. Unlike Oudolf, she is delightfully easy going in design, instead gently steering the reader into an excited confidence about making a plan. Bellamy lends guidance on the essentials – measuring and markers – before urging her readers to just crack on with the planting.

It's an infectious approach. The argument that urban soil is perfect for perennials – its low fertility creates tough plants that grow pleasingly in tandem – is refreshing for city-based gardeners who have bemoaned their overworked earth.

The finer details of growing are simple but Bellamy doesn't oversimplify the botany. She starts with a genuinely useful and succinct explanation of how to understand Latin plant names, before using them throughout the book. As a result, they are demystified. Selfishly, as a container gardener, I found myself clamouring for tips for smaller spaces, although I revelled in the inspiration Jason Ingram's photography provides.

Bellamy doesn't scrimp on the wildlife benefits of the perennial garden, specifying each plant's appeal for insects. Urban gardening has long ignored the nature around it, but even if one garden in every street adopted Bellamy's plan, our cities would be more buzzing and beautiful. *Brilliant & Wild* makes that seem enticingly possible.



DOUBLE FLOWERS: THE REMARKABLE STORY OF EXTRA-PETALLED BLOOMS

by Nicola Ferguson
Pimpernel Press, £30

ISBN 978-1910258880

A review of the horticultural novelties that are double flowers, exploring everything from their biology to the emotional responses they evoke.

Reviewer Mat Reese is head gardener at Malverleys.

The late Nicola Ferguson is probably best known for her very popular book, *Right Plant Right Place.* This new book – begun before her death in 2007 and completed by Charles Quest-Ritson – will no doubt become just as popular.

Ferguson was a psychologist by trade and the genesis behind this work is an intensely curious mind. The introduction draws you in, questioning what it is about double blooms that has lured horticulturists and florists alike over the centuries, and also gives a concise history of double flowers and how they came about. We learn that contrary to popular thought many doubles do produce nectar, that double flowers can last longer than single flowers (a particularly useful trait for florists), and that some doubles can hold on to their old flowers and look ugly.

The chapter, The What, the How and the Why of Double Flowers, is more scientific and is probably the most concise and informative study of double flowers ever undertaken.

Later chapters look at double-flowered plant varieties and, unusually, they are categorised subjectively according to their character, how they make you feel or the atmosphere they convey, under headings such as The Romantic and the Ethereal, The Formal, and The Showy and Flamboyant. Each plant is described in detail with a brief history, a look at the floral composition, and how it might be used in a garden with other plants.

Throughout the book the writing is fluid and lively, never stodgy, and the text flows seamlessly from one subject to the next. Credit should also be given to Charles Quest-Ritson who took up the reigns and finished the work after Ferguson's untimely death.

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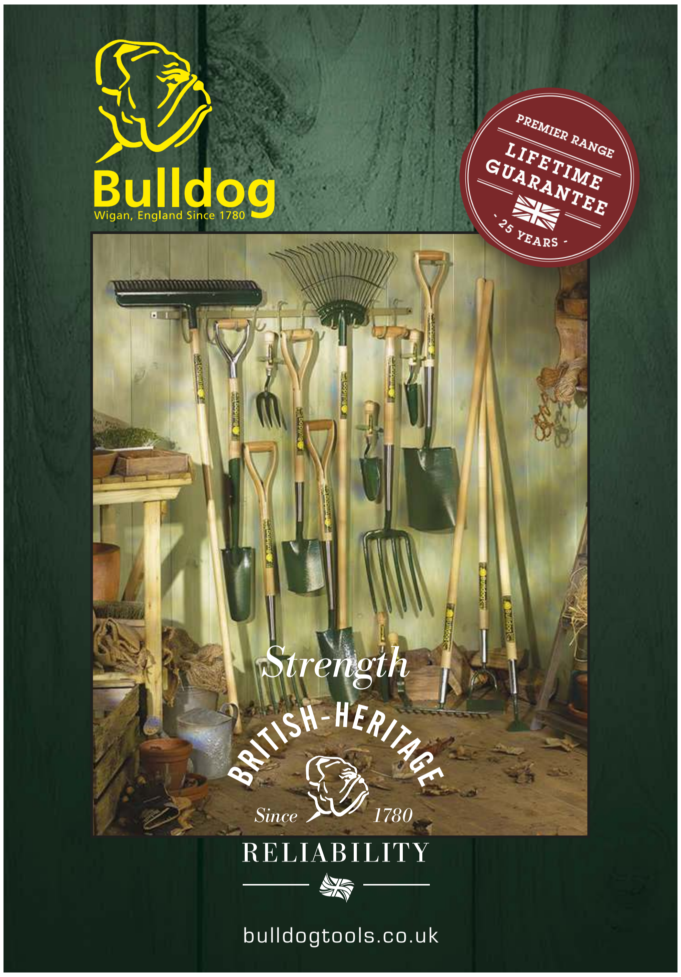
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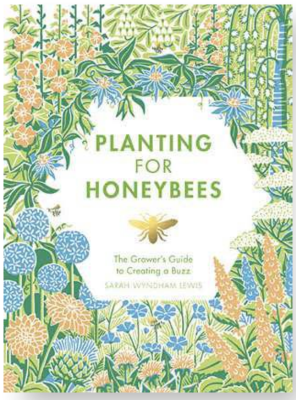
BOOK REVIEWS



PLANTING FOR HONEYBEES: THE GROWER'S GUIDE TO CREATING A BUZZ
by Sarah Wyndham Lewis
Quadrille Publishing, £12

ISBN 978-1787131460

An attractively illustrated gift that is the ideal starting point for curious gardeners hoping to attract more bees to their plot.

Reviewer Natasha Goodfellow is a freelance writer and editor.

With her husband Dale Gibson, Sarah Wyndham Lewis runs Bermondsey Street Bees and this charmingly illustrated tome has grown out of observations she has made of her own bee-friendly gardens in London and Sussex.

The reason she'd like more of us to follow suit is clearly set out in the first chapter. Despite being intrinsic to successful pollination and therefore to much of the food we eat, honeybees are under attack from loss of habitat; from insecticides and agrochemicals; from an array of pests and diseases; and from the potentially devastating loss of food sources.

What follows are useful lists of plants suitable for a range of spaces from windowsills to large gardens, and divided by season into flowers, edibles, and bushes, climbers and trees. This latter category is especially important; bees evolved as tree-dwellers and a single lime in flower apparently provides as much forage as half a football pitch's worth of wildflower meadow.

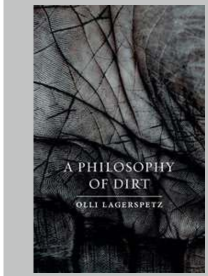
Additional ten-of-the-best lists are a handy reference and provide more information on species and cultivars; though some pointers on ultimate size or soil requirements would have made these more useful. Planting advice is minimal but this simplicity is also beguiling – Wyndham Lewis's message is that not everything needs to be complicated and simply popping in a plant that the bees are partial to is a very good start to helping them.

Chapters on the bees themselves furnish several interesting facts. Did you know, for example, that beekeepers can tell exactly what their bees are feeding on by the colour of the pollen on their legs?

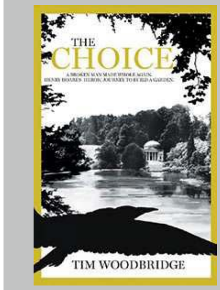
Though not a gardening book, it makes light work of attracting more honeybees throughout the seasons. ◻

Other books

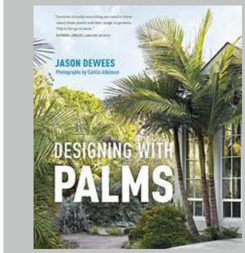
Five more new titles, from esoteric essays on dirt to practical woodworking tips and advice for novice gardeners.



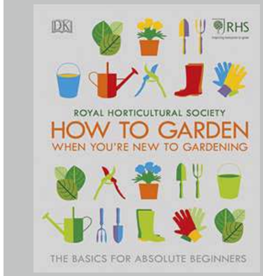
A PHILOSOPHY OF DIRT
by Olli Lagerspetz
Reaktion Books, £15
ISBN 9781780239185
A series of essays opening up a detailed discussion about dirt and how it has played its part in philosophy and culture.



THE CHOICE
by Tim Woodbridge
Dotesio Publishing
Wiltshire, £8.99
A fictional retelling of the events surrounding the creation of the magnificent 18th-century garden at Stourhead.



DESIGNING WITH PALMS
by Jason Dewees,
Photographs by
Caitlin Atkinson
Timber Press, £35
ISBN 978-1604695434
Inspiration for creating landscapes with palms.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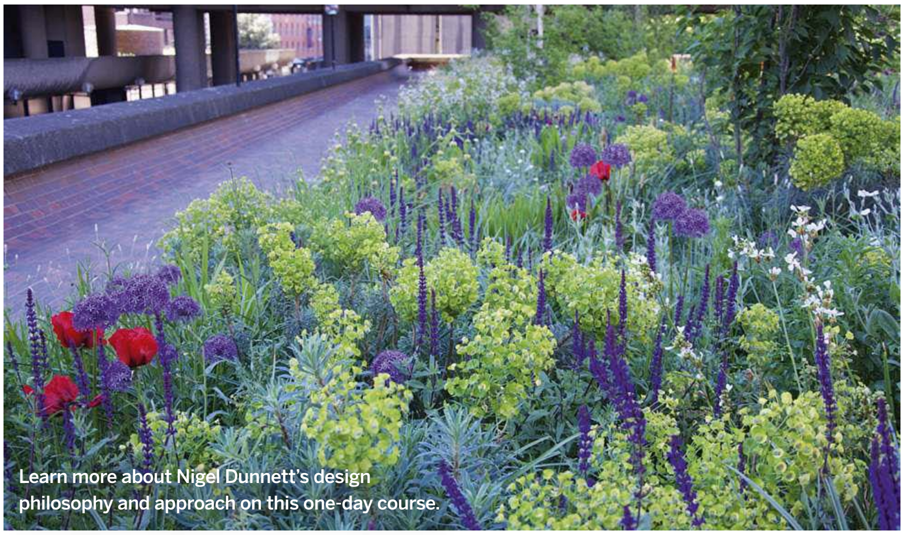
READER COMPETITIONS

Win a pair of tickets to a Garden Masterclass with Nigel Dunnett

Garden Masterclasses are a series of workshops held in association with *Gardens Illustrated* at venues across the UK. They offer the chance to gain knowledge and skills in gardening and garden design, and to share ideas with fellow gardeners. Headed by designer Annie Guilfoyle and plantsman Noel Kingsbury – the masterclasses are taught by some of the best names in horticulture and cover a wide range of topics. **gardenmasterclass.org**

COMPETITION

To launch the 2018 programme, we're offering one reader the chance to win a pair of tickets, worth £280, to the workshop The Immersive Experience – with Nigel Dunnett on Wednesday 6 June at Yeo Valley Organic Gardens, Somerset. This workshop looks at Nigel's planting design philosophy, drawing on his studies of the character of wild vegetation, and translating those ideas into plantings with year-round appeal. The day includes a tour of the gardens and meadow grassland at Yeo Valley Organic Gardens.



Learn more about Nigel Dunnett's design philosophy and approach on this one-day course.

HOW TO ENTER

For your chance to win two Masterclass places, answer the following question. **What high-profile event in 2012 showcased Nigel's work?**

Enter by post Send your answer along with your name, address, telephone number and/or email to: Gardens Illustrated 258/ Garden Masterclass. PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA.

Enter online at gardensillustrated.com

Closing date 31 March 2018.

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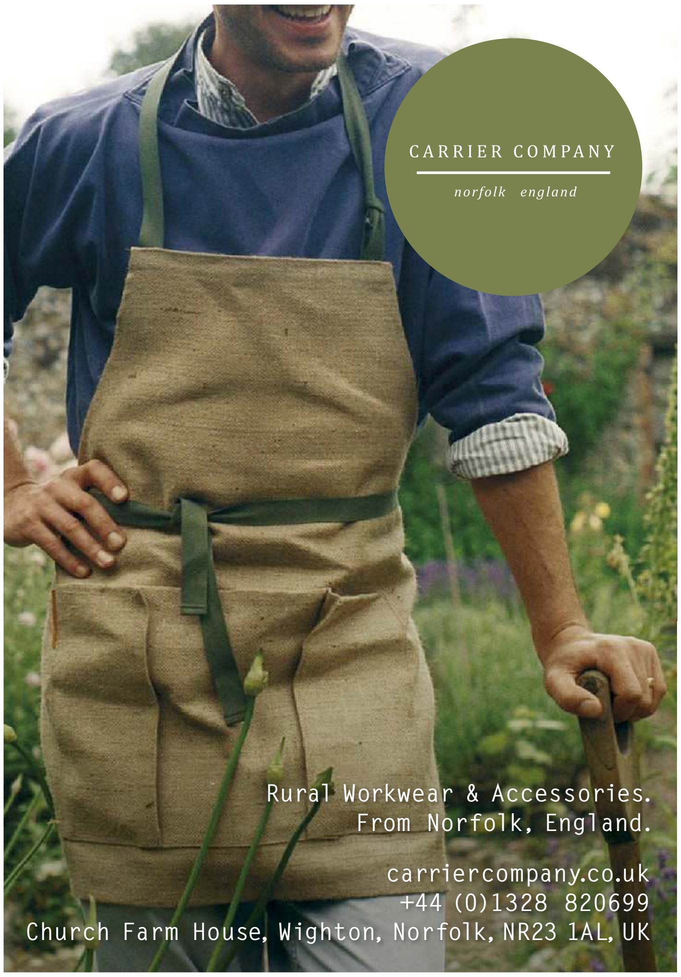
Enter online at gardensillustrated.com

Closing date 31 March 2018.

TERMS & CONDITIONS 1 Promoter: *Gardens Illustrated*, Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited. **2** Entrants must be UK residents aged 18 years or older, excluding employees of the Promoter or any company connected to the competition. **3** By entering you agree to be bound by all the rules of the promotion. **4** These promotions are subject to the laws of England. Entrants must supply the Promoter with their full name, postal address and daytime telephone number. **5** The Promoter will use entrants' personal details in accordance with the Immediate Media Privacy Policy. **6** Only one entry per person allowed. **7** No responsibility accepted for lost, delayed, ineligible or fraudulent entries. **8** Both competitions close on 31 March 2018 at 12 noon. **9** The prizes are non-transferable and cannot be used in conjunction with any other offers, promotions, or discounts. **10** No part of either prize is exchangeable for cash or any other prize. **11** There is one pair of tickets available for the Garden Masterclass competition for the workshop held on 6/6/18 at Yeo Valley Organic Gardens. The prize is for that workshop only and must be taken on that day. The winner is responsible for their own transport to the venue and any expenses incurred. **12** The prize for the STIHL competition is one STIHL RMA235 mower including battery and charger. **13** One winner for each competition will be chosen at random from all eligible entries. **14** The winner for each competition will be notified within 7 days of the closing date. **15** The draw is final and no correspondence will be entered into. **16** For details of the winners send an SAE to Immediate Media Company, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN within two months of the closing date. **17** If any winner is unable to be contacted within 14 days of the closing date, the Promoter will offer the prize to a runner up. **18** Promoter reserves the right to substitute the prize with one of the same or greater value. **19** Immediate Media Company Limited (publishers of *Gardens Illustrated*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers, and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these please write 'NO GI INFO' on your entry. **20** STIHL would like to send you news of special offers and other promotions. If you would like to receive these please write 'STIHL INFO' on your entry. Garden Masterclass would like to send you newsletters, together with special offers, and other promotions. If you would like to receive these please write 'GARDEN MASTERCLASS INFO' on your entry.



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Venetian dahlia collection.

NEW FOR 2018
Rubens dahlia collection.

Sublime dark dahlia collection.

Sarah's advice on planting dahlias

In a good year, dahlias will flower from late June to early December. Pot them up in March or early April, in a large (at least 2L) pot filled with multipurpose potting compost. Place in a light, frost-free place and keep the compost moist. They will have formed bushy plants by the time frosts have ended and be in flower by the beginning of July. Or you can plant them straight into the ground when the frosts are over. Keep cutting to increase flower production, for flowers all summer.

HOW TO ORDER

Visit **sarahraven.com** and enter offer code GIL18MAR when placing order to claim your £5 discount, or call 0345 092 0283 and quote offer code. Tubers sent from late February. **Offer valid** until 31 March 2018.

* Discount of £5 is off the total order on these three collections only and is subject to availability. Offer can be used once and not in conjunction with any other offer or discount. Previous purchases are not valid. Offer not valid at the Perch Hill shop. Standard P&P of £4.95 is payable on the order. Unfortunately, Sarah Raven is not able to send tubers outside of the UK.

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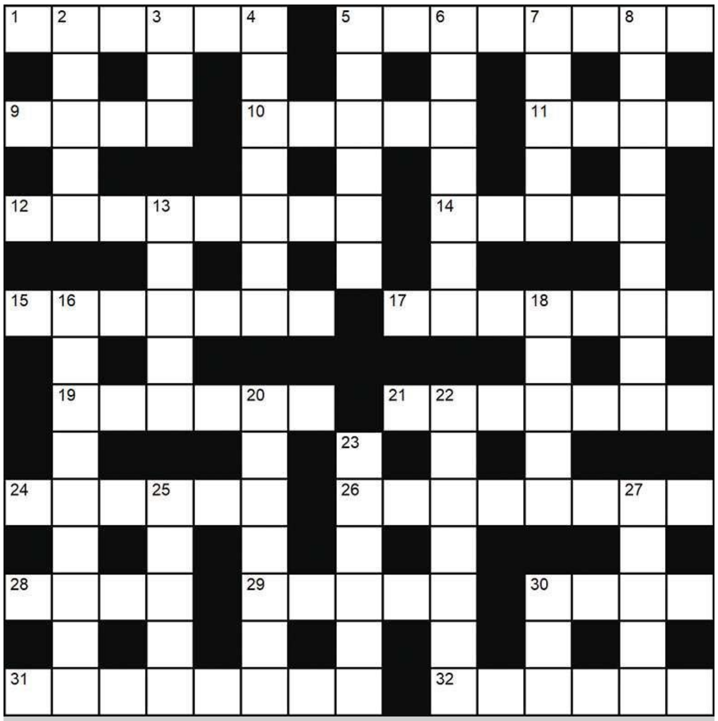
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ACROSS

1 Sweet bay's strange allure (6)
5 The goldenrod genus – compact, in the past? (8)
9 See 27 down
10 Pointed shape of an arum leaf, say (5)
11 Aroma… from some oregano's exceptional! (4)
12 Most popular form of *Photinia* – cheeky garden visitor (3,5)
14 Riddler's garden utensil? (5)
15 Species of *Weigela* named after southern US state (7)
17 A white-flowering honeysuckle – beloved of Chloe? (7)
19 Sea-pink husbandry (6)
21 A fern genus – modified damson round centre of fruit (7)
24 *Ginkgo biloba*, maidenhair tree, is a living one (6)
26 Water plant also called bulrush – deem acer, perhaps (8)
28/2 down Tomato fondness by James Grieve, perhaps (4,5)
29 Grow like Ivy say (5)
30 19th-century plant hunter William ___ – contributing to Hooker rhododendrons (4)
31 Hydrangeas with flattened flowerheads (8)
32 Hosta with blue leaves – limped off (6)

DOWN

2 See 28 across
3 Over-watering may cause this? Baloney! (3)
4 It produces a foliage shoot (7)
5/23 down Term for first cabbages of the year (6,6)
6 Genus of rosette-forming plants wise Ali cultivated (7)
7 Some garden seed is tightly packed (5)
8 Family of plants including African violet – a designer re-arranged (9)
13 Less common… in winter, are raspberries! (5)
16 Genus of shrub in borage family… upset tailor – d'oh! (9)
18 Potato plant stem (5)
20 CIA file about 'Blue Daisy' genus! (7)
22 Rose hip is one such (4,3)
23 See 5 down
25 Turnip-like vegetable in allotments we destroyed (5)
27/9 across Fungal disease of woody plants, oddly crops a lot (5,4)
30 A deep purple Cape primrose… initially kept in moss (3)

SOLUTIONS TO THIS MONTH'S CROSSWORD WILL BE PRINTED NEXT MONTH

FEBRUARY 2018 SOLUTIONS

ACROSS 1/26 African lily **5** Empress **9/8** Eric Smith **10/17** Baden-Baden **12** Emir **13** Myosotis **14** Rajah **16** Hebes **18** Hyacinth **20** Daydream **22** Natal **23** Tonic **24** Syringas **28** Moats **29** Echo **30** Crowns **31** Leaf scar.

DOWN 2 Forsythia **3** Incas **4** Arbutus **6** Monarda **7** Rue **11** Deschampsia **15** Joint **19** Tulbaghia **21** Eucomis **22** Nerissa **23** Trier **25** Neeps **27** Yew.

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Hardiness ratings explained

If you've ever wondered how to interpret the hardiness ratings included with plant details, here's a guide to the systems developed to help you get the best from your garden and plants

WORDS **DR JOHN DAVID AND LEIGH HUNT** ILLUSTRATION **CHRIS JONES**

There's no agreed definition of hardiness but, for our purposes, it is a plant's ability to endure cold conditions, or in the UK, the ability to withstand changeable periods of freezing and relatively mild, wet weather. Plants are adapted to tolerate cold to varying degrees. Some will take a light frost (temperatures just below freezing) for a couple of hours, others cope with long periods of freezing to remarkably low temperatures.

Based on accumulated experience of a plant's performance we can establish its hardiness. This is usually presented as a scale, from least hardy to most hardy, normally using winter minimum temperature as the measure. This is exemplified by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) scale, developed in the 1960s for North America but now widely used in other countries. The USDA system is a scale of zones from 1 (very hardy) to 13 (least hardy). The zones are defined by 10°F steps, each one being more recently divided into two 5°F subzones indicated 'a' and 'b'. The US zones have been mapped in remarkable detail and plants can be assigned a rating according to the coldest zone in which they can grow, or as shown in the magazine a range of zones in which the plant is known to grow.

The USDA system has been applied to the UK and Europe and gardeners here can use the mapped zones as a general guide. In addition, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has a more descriptive system of hardiness ratings. Like the USDA system, it uses a scale (in 5°C steps) from H1 (subdivided into a, b and c) to H7, based on winter minimum temperatures but note that it runs in the opposite direction to the USDA system – 1 is very tender, 7 is very hardy. To help reflect the variable nature of UK winters, each rating also has a description for the garden conditions.

The important thing to remember about the RHS system is that it is a rating of the plant's hardiness and has not been translated into mapped zones for the UK.

In the end, hardiness systems provide a useful guide to predict what gardeners should be able to grow in their gardens. While beginners are likely to depend on the certainty of growing plants that are reliably hardy, enthusiasts will want to push the boundaries and experiment with more borderline plants. ◻

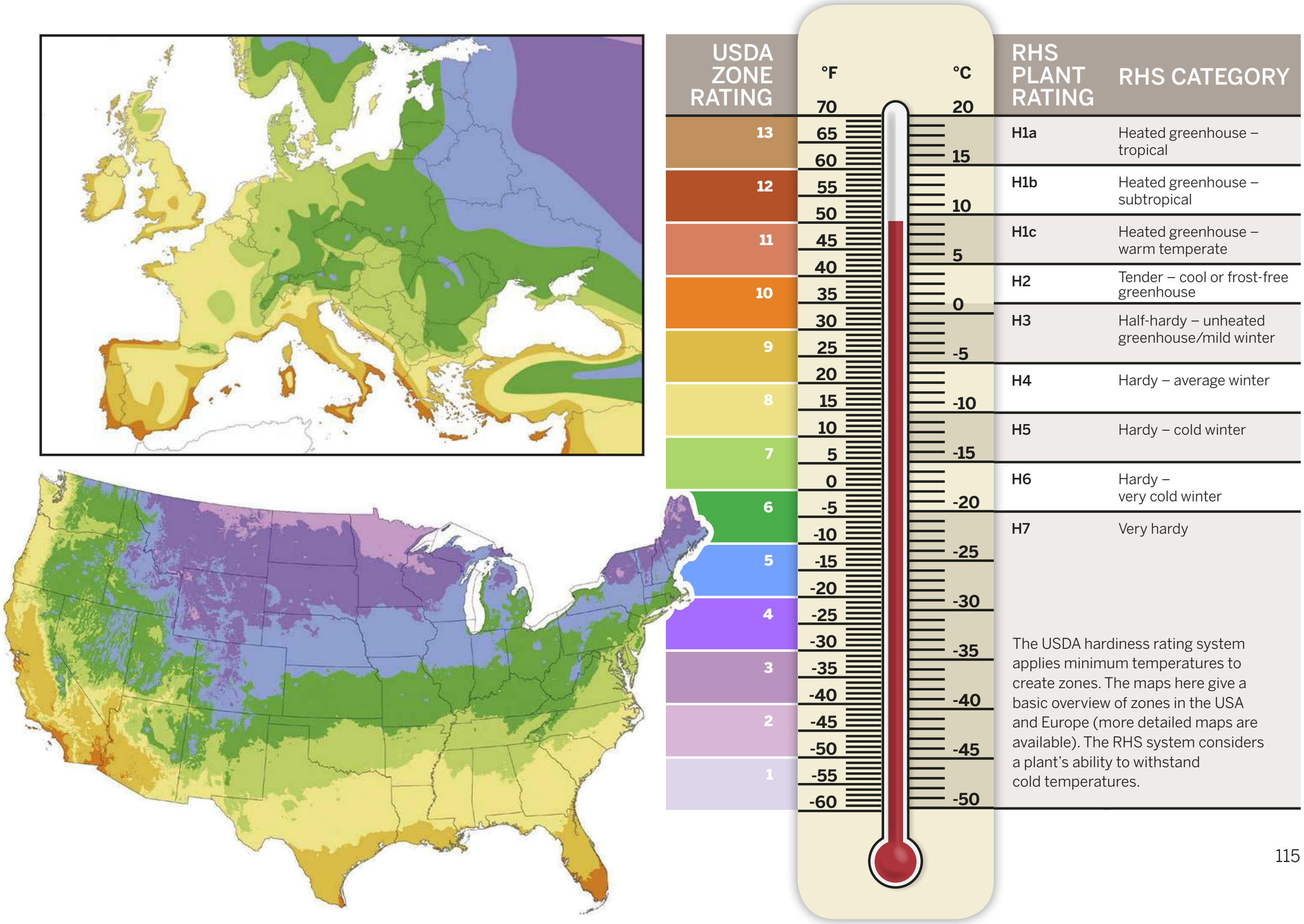
Dr John David is head of horticultural taxonomy and Leigh Hunt is principal horticultural advisor, both at RHS Wisley.

USEFUL INFORMATION

RHS hardiness ratings rhs.org.uk/plants/trials-awards/award-of-garden-merit/rhs-hardiness-rating

USDA hardiness maps planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb

- A longer version of this article appeared in issue 229.



RHS PLANT RATING	RHS CATEGORY
H1a	Heated greenhouse – tropical
H1b	Heated greenhouse – subtropical
H1c	Heated greenhouse – warm temperate
H2	Tender – cool or frost-free greenhouse
H3	Half-hardy – unheated greenhouse/mild winter
H4	Hardy – average winter
H5	Hardy – cold winter
H6	Hardy – very cold winter
H7	Very hardy

The USDA hardiness rating system applies minimum temperatures to create zones. The maps here give a basic overview of zones in the USA and Europe (more detailed maps are available). The RHS system considers a plant's ability to withstand cold temperatures.

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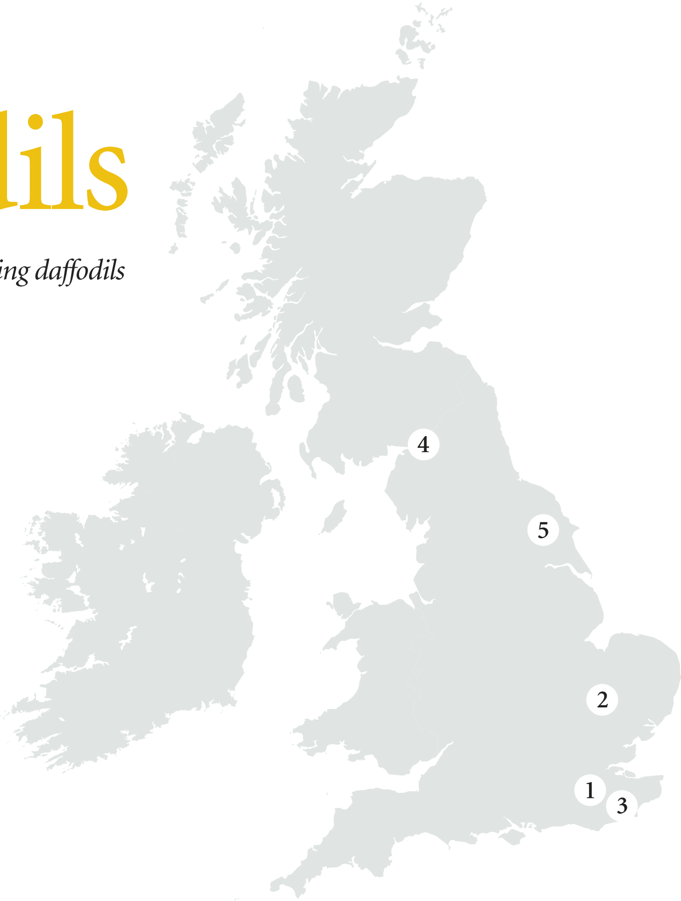

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nationaltrust.org.uk/smallhythe-place | 01580 762334

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4 KIRKLINTON HALL & GARDENS

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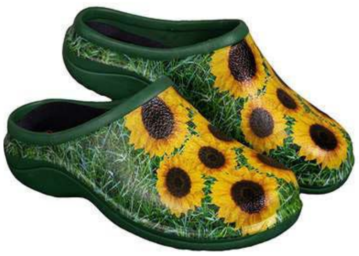

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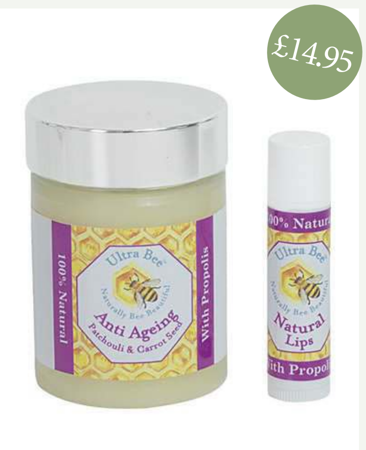

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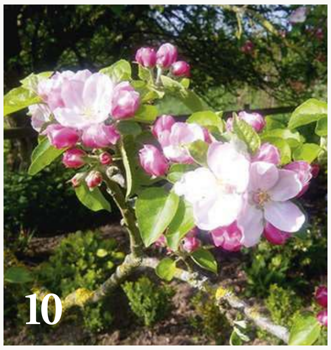

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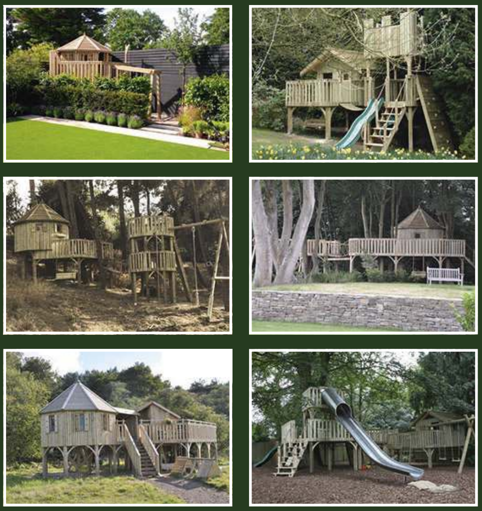

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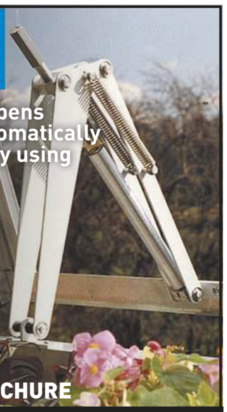

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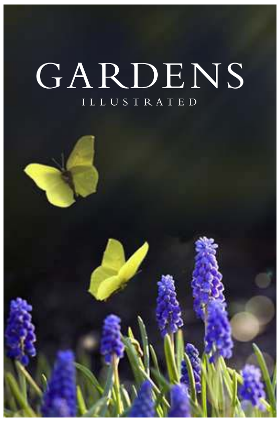

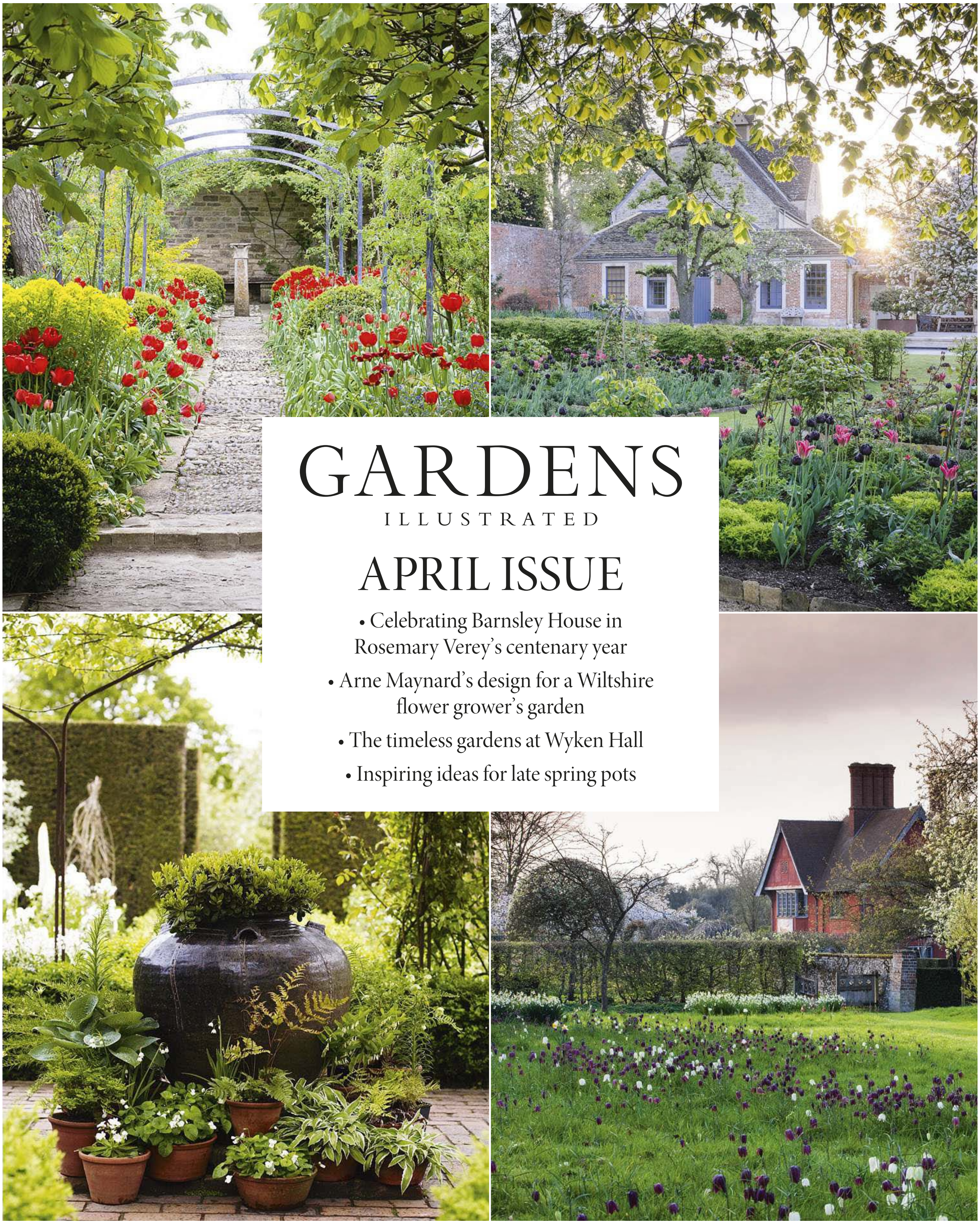

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- Celebrating Barnsley House in Rosemary Verey's centenary year
- Arne Maynard's design for a Wiltshire flower grower's garden
- The timeless gardens at Wyken Hall
- Inspiring ideas for late spring pots

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WRITER'S PLOT

SINGING THE BLUES

This month Frank finds himself counting down to the spring equinox, not in days and hours but in small blue flowers

WORDS **FRANK RONAN** ILLUSTRATION **RACHEL VICTORIA HILLIS**

WE NEED A SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF SMALL BLUE THINGS. A SINGLE PINPRICK OF GOOD BLUE CAN MAKE YOUR DAY AND BRING A GARDEN TO LIFE

It is a time for small blue things. No good will be had from looking at the sky to guess what will happen next, or at nude branches to wonder how long until decency. We are counting to the equinox, not in days but in ridiculously undersized flowers. Some think it is all about yellow now, and yellow is indeed blazing everywhere to keep the majority distracted. You and I are focused on blue delicacies in between the brazen. In another month, there will be forget-me-nots and bluebells and then blue will be old hat. We awkward squad did yellow last month, smug in our aconites, and next month we may be lauding white (stitchwort, or whatever no one else is taking the trouble to notice).

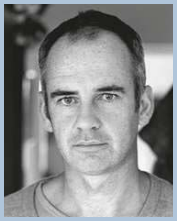
Scilla siberica won't be with us in quantity for another few weeks, but stray heralds appear at random throughout March, in some ways more exciting that the actual event. Being a good, solid blue, set off on wine-dark stems, it can make a presence felt in small quantities. *S. bithynica* is more washed out, almost white sometimes, but comes earlier and in rollicking quantities and so can be forgiven for being spare in pigment. It is one of those plants that people say should be better known and more easily available, but might be less lovable if it were. All the populations I know have nice provenances – you got it from Laura who got it from Pip who got it from Christo who got it from Cherry. The genealogy adds a charm necessary to a plant of such ebullience.

Other squills are more available, and it might be worth trying a few to see what likes you most. I did so with *S. bifolia* once and was less astonished by its early demise once I spotted the alpine in the vernacular title. Next on my to-do list are the hybrids made between *Scilla* and the related *Chionodoxa* (which you can't help thinking should have been named Charybdis with that in mind – have you ever actually seen it glorifying a snowmound?). The x *Chionoscilla*, as they have, with even less imagination, been named, are reputed to have a vigour that might make them more likely to survive here than either parent. There was a time when you could get named varieties, but I don't know where you'd track them down now. We need a Society for the Preservation of Small Blue Things.

Omphalodes cappadocica, being in with the borages, is a very good blue, and the one I look forward to most. Up here it appears in March, just, in a good year. The flowers are borne over leaves of a clear green and look best if allowed to drip over an edge. The good form is 'Cherry Ingram' (he from whom the *S. bithynica* began in our genealogies). If you crave novelty, there is also something called 'Starry Eyes', which is fun, but not to be mourned when it doesn't stay with you. The 'Cherry Ingram' form stays and is an unbelievable blue every year.

Other little blues are easily overlooked: *Muscari*, because when they are successful they are too easy, but they will thrive in difficult places and on neglect, and a potful for the house reminds you how good the scent is; *Pulmonaria*, because we think of coarse soldiers and sailors and forget that the soldiers can be eliminated in the best forms – 'Blue Ensign' for some, 'Munstead Blue' for me; and reticulate irises, because they can't deal with the hurly-burly of the border and really need to be kept in pots, unlike the obliging woodlanders.

As the month closes, the blues expand. Blue anemones and blue kinds of *Clematis alpina* appear, but by then the riot will have begun and flowers will need to be larger to be seen at all. Now, while those leaves that have so far appeared are small and few against the brown earth, a single pinprick of good blue can make your day and bring a garden to life. □



Frank Ronan is a novelist who lives and gardens in Worcestershire.

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